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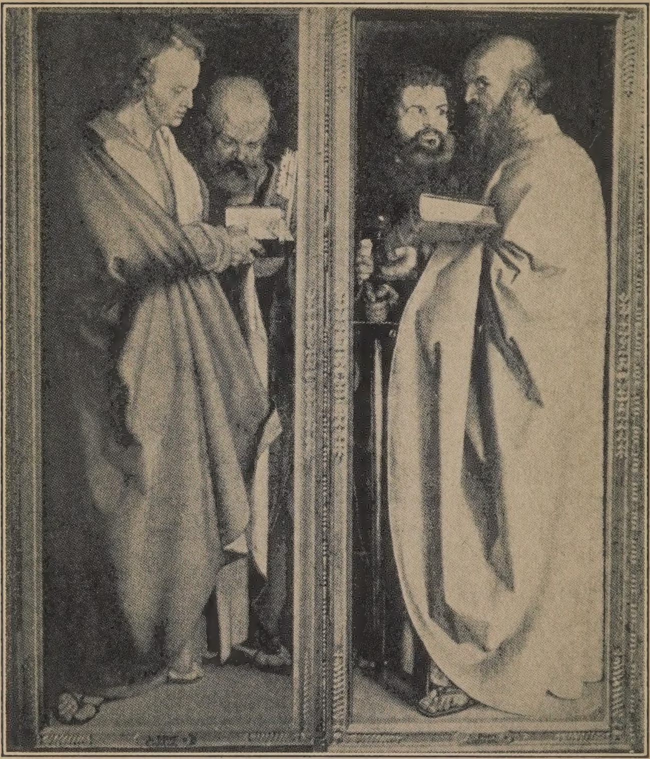

JOHN
PETER
MARK
PAUL

A PANELED PICTURE OF FOUR SAINTS
BY ALBRECHT DURER, 1471-1528

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CARDINAL CHARACTERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A Study in Transition

By

LAWRENCE OTTO LINEBERGER

PHILADELPHIA
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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Dedicated to

MY WIFE

Who bore additional labors that this book
might be written

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PREFACE

"There is one study, my Christian brethren, which never can lose its interest for us so long as we are men: and that is, the investigation of human character. The deep interest of biography consists in this—that it is in some measure the description to us of our own inner history. You cannot unveil the secrets of another heart without at the same time finding something to correspond with, and perchance explain, the mysteries of your own. Between the wisest and the worst there are ten thousand points of marvelous resemblance; and so the trials, the frailties, the bitterness of any human soul, faithfully traced out, ever shadow out to us a portraiture of our own experience. Give but the inner heart-history of the most elevated spirit that ever conquered in life's struggle, place it before the most despicable that ever failed, and you exhibit to him so much of the picture of your own very self that you perchance command his deepest attention. Only let the inarticulate life of the peasant find for itself a distinct voice and a true biographer, let the inward struggles which have agitated that rough frame be given faithfully to the world, and there is not a monarch whose soul will not be thrilled with those inner details of an existence with which outwardly he has not a single thought in common."

These words of F. W. Robertson voice a truth which to most minds will appear self-evident. But the task of analyzing and cataloguing human beings, while fascinating, surely, is by no means easy. It is no simple matter adequately to account for the most prosaic and regular souls among us; and if this be true of men in the average, it is yet more bafflingly true of those irregular and great ones of our human story. But in order properly to interpret the observer must, in a real sense, identify himself with the observed. This the author feels he has in great measure been able to do.

"All longings fail save that to understand," is an apothegm which is truer when applied to personalities, perhaps, than to all other things, and (for a vast company) truer of Biblical persons than of others.

If it is the glory of God to conceal things, as the Bible tells us, it is the glory of men to search them out. These engrossing characters of the New Testament have been the subjects of painstaking and persistent study through the years; many volumes on them have come to light, during the last decade, especially. They have not yet been fully explored, however, and while this book does not claim to be such an achievement, but only an aid thereto, the author feels a measure of satisfaction with the portraits as sketched in these unpretentious pages. To say the least, he has had no little "glory" of the kind above mentioned in his effort to search them out. And if into these great souls some little windows have been opened, there is sufficient reason for this book, despite the many already published on the subject.

There is an enchantment about these First Century men—some of them sons of the radiant dawn, others children of the night. Some, it is true, had souls of mud, while others—and by far the larger number of them—had souls of purest crystal. Some came to the sunset of life to find their dreams of youth more than fulfilled, and expired full of hope gazing toward the Elysian Fields: others found that the golden fruit of Hesperides had become Apples of Sodom on their tongues. But, taken together, these first associates of Jesus present in luminous miniature the religious history of mankind.

"Know thyself," is golden advice; but he who would best know himself must know these men: for they accurately mirror and reflect the inner mysteries of *all* men. And because of their singular vision, or the ghastly lack of it in some cases, (as for instance, Judas and Pilate), in one way or the other, either as warning or inspiration, they are monitors for all men. They were sprung from the most virile race on earth, and were shaped and polished into instruments of world-enlightenment at the hands of the most virile Teacher earth ever saw. Upon them Christ's influence was such that they acquired not a taste but a passion to learn and serve. He awakened their latent instincts and guided and shaped each one to the utmost usefulness in his own way. Moreover, the Master took these men—poles apart in their tastes and natures—and welded them into a unity the like of which the world had not seen before; thus revealing affinities of soul hidden in natures otherwise so far apart and diverse.

Time has been unable to dim or diminish these names; rather it has steadily added new lustre to them. They remain so high that "age and comparison," to borrow a phrase from Emerson, "has not robbed them of a ray." They went forth tinged with the mind of Jesus to tinge, in turn, the mind of all succeeding ages. In this school of Christ the rude became gentle; the stupid, intelligent; the wavering, determined; the unsanctified, holy; and in this group, as in no other, heaven and earth met and adorned each other.

The Prodigal Son and the Elder Brother cannot, of course, be classed as historical persons: they are parabolic figures; but are so universally typical of all men, it is felt, as to justify their treatment here.

Taken as a thesis, the object of the book is this: To show, on the one hand, the spiritual progress made by those of the number who responded to the training of Jesus; on the other, the moral decline of those who did not.

The author does not lay claim to complete novelty of treatment; he is, of course, under obligation to several works on Biblical characters and others, including various translations of the New Testament, for suggestions and new shades of interpretation, and for accuracy in details, (see Bibliography); and yet he feels that the treatment is fresh and different and new.

Writing as he does for average folk—the breadwinners of our day and their like—he has avoided all technical terms of the scholars for the sake of clarity.

Effort has been made to make due acknowledgement of sources and quotations at the proper places throughout the book. If any have been overlooked (sometimes they were unknown), this is matter for regret to the author.

Let it be said, finally, that some consideration has been given to chronological order, but not too much; significance rather than sequence has taken precedence in the grouping of these characters, and it is felt that as the sequence unfolds their significance increases.

LAWRENCE O. LINEBERGER

Thornville, Ohio
March 1, 1930

CARDINAL CHARACTERS
OF
THE NEW TESTAMENT

"Great men stand like solitary towers in the City of God."—*Longfellow.*

"There are heroes in evil as well as in good."
—*La Rochefoucauld.*

CHAPTER I

JOHN THE BAPTIST SOARING AND WAVERING

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."—John 1:29.

"Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?"—Matthew 11:3.

I

A few months before our Lord began His revolutionizing career as teacher, preacher, and Saviour of men, there burst upon the slumbering world a rare spirit. He came fresh from the wilderness solitudes of Judea. From the environs of nature and nature's God he came with an attractiveness and power seldom displayed by man. He was a fire; he was a flame; he was a conflagration.

This interesting, enthralling character is John the Baptist. The man, at home in all wild and solitary places, is preaching in the wilderness out by the Jordan. For some reason—perhaps the early death of his parents, or, which is more probable, the extreme corruption of the age—he had betaken himself as a young man to the neighboring wilderness, and there had lived the lonely, austere life of a religious ascetic.

Doubtless, while in the desert, John had thought much upon such prophetic spirits as Elijah, Jeremiah and Micah, his predecessors as prophets to a heedless people, all of whom had arisen from that same general locality to bear their message to Israel. At any rate he had meditated upon God and pondered over the problems of the age until he came to feel himself called of God to be a prophet to his people. "This stalwart prophet," says Farrar, "had learnt a language, he had received a revelation, not vouchsafed to ordinary men —attained, not in the schools of the Rabbis, but in the school of solitude, in the school of God."

It is significant that most of the world's great teachers of religion have been schooled in the desert; have been desert men with desert minds—Moses, Amos, Jeremiah, Buddha, Mohammed, and most significant of all, Jesus Himself; for, from this same Judean wilderness Christ emerged from the days of the Temptation and went forth full of the might of God to His unique prophethood. It is as Lowell has said,

> "If chosen souls could never be alone
> In deep mid-silence, open-doored to God,
> No great thing ever had been dreamed or done,
> The nurse of full-grown souls is solitude."[1]

And so John sprang from the soul-stirring, God-haunted desert full of a new impetuosity and fire, a fire in whose passionate and purifying flame evils that were deeply entrenched and powerful melted and gave way.

Such teachers are needed for such times. There was full and plenty of those respectable, conventional teachers, "who spake smooth things and prophesied deceits." So out of the weird wilderness onto the banks of the leisurely Jordan, with a ledge of rock for his pulpit, John stood forth to address the expectant, awe-struck throngs.

II

Let us picture in our minds this preacher and his congregation. All of the adjacent towns and villages have emptied themselves to wait upon his message. What a passionate, fiery figure he is! Dressed, like Elijah, in a mantle of camel's hair, the severe garb of the Hebrew prophet, his locks unshorn, his countenance bronzed by the Syrian sun, his lips close-pressed; he is the very image of a new, strange earnestness.

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[1] *Poems,* Houghton, Mifflin Co.

He is doing two things, this terse preacher from the wilds—denouncing and announcing. He is denouncing evil in all its forms. He is announcing the soon-coming of the long-looked-for Deliverer. His words are surcharged with the might of prophetic authority. He is so sure of himself and his message, so original, so enthusiastic, so different—a new type of man with an entirely new type of message for his case-hardened, scribe-ridden, priest-burdened age. His very teaching reflected the imagery of the wilderness—the rock, the serpent, the barren tree, the harvester's fan, the woodman's axe—"The whole man was a sermon". He penetrated beneath the hollow shell of pretentious Pharisee and Scribe, comparing them to the vipers which he had so often seen crawling over the wilderness rocks, threatening them with the woodman's axe, the smelter's furnace and the harvester's winnowing fan. He poured a denunciatory torrent of sulphuric language on the heads of all who thronged his wilderness cathedral to hear—"generations of vipers", that's what he called their great ones. His words were pungent and spirit-stirring, replete with startling effects. So compelling was he, so great his powers of persuasion, that proud Pharisees, skeptical Saducees and hardened sinners alike, listened with accusing consciences and stricken hearts, and were all moved with a deep concern to enquire in one voice, *"What must we do?"*

III

Religiously the age was dry as dust. A bleak hopelessness had settled like a pall over the minds of men. There was a general expectation of "the wrath to come" which would precede the coming Kingdom. Crime was universal; atheism was rife; morals were in a state of decay. But it was the deep darkness before the dawn. Even the pagan world felt that the "fullness of time" had come. Yesterday's fires had become today's ashes; but John would blow the ashes away and re-kindle the fire. His religious conviction was so intense, his faith so sublime, his enthusiasm so boundless, that, after hearing him, men dared to hope again. He was like a spring suddenly burst forth in a parched and thirsty land. Here was a new voice from God in the midst of the dull, disconsolate years. Here was an unfettered mind, a free and unfaltering spirit. John compelled men to rethink their religion. He was the spiritual son of Elijah, and the spiritual father of Luther, of Savonarola, of Wesley, each of whom, with the magnificent urgency of a new message to the world, revived religion and forced his age to take on a new and spiritual character.

Perhaps no prophet ever enjoyed such boundless success as did John in his early ministry. Men in all stations of life—soldiers, Pharisees, Priests, Publicans—were compelled by his preaching to hearken to conscience until, finding no peace, they cried helplessly: "What shall we do?" Not even King Herod in his voluptuous palace could escape the sinister voice which mercilessly thundered against sin in low places and in high. "It is not lawful for thee to have her," he shouted in the ears of the king, who was criminally living with the wife of another man, and had sought the prophet's palliation for his sin.

John was the peerless prophet of his age. He made men think of Elijah, the sturdy and commanding Tishbite. After his death Jesus, reflecting upon his character, said, "I say unto you, among them that are born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist." He recognized John's moral kinship to the great Tishbite and paid high tribute to both of them: "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed with soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft raiment are in king's houses. But what went ye out to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet . . . and if ye will receive it, this is Elijah which was to come." John was no "little round, fat, oily man of God."

John's genius, chafing against the smugness of old, effete conventionalities, swung into heroic disregard of their rules and rubrics. Knowing that the Kingdom of God could not be made out of a generation of sinners and pedants, he loosed the lightning of his indignation upon their pride and sterile self-righteousness; he pled passionately for transition, for change.

John is one of time's great sons; the centuries assemble to do him homage; history is redated from his birth. But, like all the prophets, his vision of the Kingdom of God was a strange mingling of gleam and gloom.

The Baptist was like Elijah his forbear in several ways. Like him he rebuked his king. Like him he found his worst foe in his king's wife. He baptised and preached, it is thought, on the very spot where Elijah did his mighty works in Ahab's kingdom.

History sometimes repeats itself in striking ways. Does it not seem as if Elijah, the severe ascetic, uncourtley in manners, bold in speech, fearless in denouncing sin; that Ahab, a man not totally destitute of good impulses and amiable feelings, yet weak and wicked, the puppet husband of an unscrupulous wife; that Jezebel, depraved, crafty, resolute, utterly devoid of moral character, not scrupling to use any means, no matter how atrocious, which would accomplish her ends—does it not seem, I say, that Ahab, Jezebel, and Elijah have all reappeared in the persons of Herod, Herodias and John? The similarity was too plain, anyhow, for the contemporaries of the Baptist to miss, and they said John was Elijah over again; not only was he a follower of the formidable Tishbite, but his *reincarnation.*

John could have stepped, had he chosen, into the priesthood of Israel and into ease; but spiritual inertia had crept over Israel, and the young priest went into the desert to let the solitudes shape him into a prophet mightier than Amos or Jeremiah. He became a desert solitary, a student of God, of the soul, and the signs of the time. He quitted the restless haunts of men that he might the better see the face of God. He disapproved of the foul society in which he found himself. He deplored the senile decay which everywhere abounded. He felt himself called to bring about reforms to match those of Elijah, his celebrated forerunner.

In the wilderness we may be sure that John spent much time brooding over the words, especially the sterner elements, of the ancient prophets. Like Moses and Amos in similar rôles, he pondered the problems of his age, came to feel the crying need and to vision the remedy.

When he saw that Israel's salvation lay in spiritual quickening and cleansing, he began to preach. He had but one sermon: *Repentance;* and but one text: "*Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand;*" and at the heart of all his preaching there was but one

Person; the King of that Kingdom, or Messiah.

This sermon upon this text centering upon this Person, John preached with such passion and power that the whole Jewish world, as we have seen, was stirred to a frenzy, and became, says Josephus, "ready to do anything he advised." Israel had seen no such prophet for centuries. His fervor and originality, together with his trumpet-voice calling in hammer-like refrains "Repent ye, repent ye," struck consternation into the complacent souls of the multitudes. They had been saying all their life, "We are Abraham's children, no harm can befall us." But John said, "Children of Abraham or not, all is not well; repent, make you clean before God."

John was another Amos reappearing to denounce ceremony and demand repentance, good character, and right conduct toward all men, as essentials to fellowship and favor with God. The age of John in many ways resembled the age of Amos. Both faced a similar set of moral conditions; the import of their preaching was the same, and produced like results. Amos denounced the immoral worship of Jereboam II, and John denounced the immoral living of Herod Antipas, and for their utterances both were arrested and silenced. The utter spiritual barrenness of ceremonialism *per se* was the theme of both Amos and the Baptist. Amos thundered in the ears of Amaziah the high priest of Bethel, speaking for God, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. . . . But let justice run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." And John, seeing the priests from Jerusalem in his congregation, cried, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" As in Amos' day, so in John's, the priests had substituted rites for righteousness and legalism for love.

Like all prophets, John was a nonconformist (Emerson says all great men are), his winged spirit rightly could not be confined by the rigid conventions of the day. He was restive under the time-honored restrictions: naively, he set them at naught.

Discontent is the spur to achievement. John was gloriously discontent with things as they were. His sermons!—what edifices of grace and power he erected on Jordan's banks! His was a spacious intellect, a blazing heart, an unsullied soul that disdained quibble and all subterfuge. He was indomitable, unanswerable, powerful as a hewer-down of oaks.

Throngs stood gaping at him. With what skill did he demolish their theological house of cards! With what ease did he sweep their specious and insubstantial, if plausible, tenets away; His speech, while exuberant and devastating, was yet withal strangely beguiling. He was never blatant or impudent, but vibrant with a glowing earnestness always. He was virile and animated, but no religious fanatic. Faith was an obsession of his. He had a presentiment of a Kingdom to be.

IV

John had the narrowness and hurry characteristic of youth. He was uncompromising and incapable of waiting. He pictured Christ subverting the whole order of things, ushering in sweeping and Titanic reforms presently. "His fan is in his hand"—judgment is here; "Repent ye"—the Kingdom of God has come; "Behold the Lamb of God"—redemption is near! With this fiery preacher-prophet it was either black or white, midnight or noon, good or bad, heaven or hell. As George Matheson says, he was "intolerant of middle courses." What moral earnestness in the man! What conviction, what invective, what persuasion, what spiritual grandeur, strength, humility!

The peak of John's ministry came on the day when Jesus, having heard so much of him, went to see and to be baptized by him in Jordan. With great ecstasy and triumph he introduced Jesus to the wondering throng saying: "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." It was John's crowning day.

The way for Christ had been prepared, the work of John was done. Thenceforth the fame of the Baptist waned, while that of Jesus waxed. And this was as the noble Baptist would have it. John was overawed by Jesus. Before Him the fierce prophet of the desert quickly became submissive, like a timid child. He who could rebuke kings, and unmask Pharisees with indignation, in the presence of the majesty of Jesus lost all his lofty bearing. Before that Presence he felt as nothing.

For months a great wave of popularity had surged about the Baptist. Universal applause was accorded him, but it had moved him not. It was coming to be generally believed that he was the Messiah. He could have passed for "that Prophet which was to come." The leaders of the nation came from Jerusalem to ask him: "Art thou the Christ?" He confessed: "I am not the Christ." "Art thou Elias?" He said: "I am not." "Art thou the Prophet?" He answered: "No." "Well, who art thou then?" they demanded. He said: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready for the coming of the King." He had no imposing thing to say of himself. That other John, John the beloved disciple, has described him as "a man sent from God," but he calls himself a "voice."

John was a *voice,* not a mere *echo.* It is true that many are content to be *echoes,* not John; he was a *voice.* Being a voice was what cost him his life. He could have saved himself by playing echo. The world still prefers echoes to voices: they are fainter, smoother, and less disquieting. But to play echo is to be like other people, and easily classified; while to come with a *voice* speaking new, daring things is different and disturbing. It has its price, too.

In this self-depreciation John showed his true greatness. This was before he had met Jesus. Now that Jesus has come on the scene, he shows his bigness of soul yet more. It was now plain that his light must recede before the larger light of Christ. Dawn must give way to day. The moon must wane before the shining sun. John is to be eclipsed by Jesus. "I must decrease, He must increase," he said, with a true sense of the supreme fitness of things. It is significant that John the Baptist's Day in the Church calendar is midsummer, 24th of June, after which there is a steady decrease in the length of the days. It is the fall time. But Christmas is Jesus' birthday, and after Christmas the days gradually lengthen into springtime and golden summertime. John is a setting star of the night; Jesus the rising Day Star of the Morning.

"I must decrease," he said, and in magnificent unselfishness pointed his followers to Jesus. When some complained that men were leaving him and going to Jesus, John was big enough to say, "Jesus is the Bridegroom, I am but the Bridegroom's friend; I came to ask for the hand of the bride and arrange for the marriage; my work is done." He had introduced the Jewish nation to the Messiah. He believed that Israel's hope had come; that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. Was not this their long-looked-for King? Not a doubt beclouded the fair sky of this the Baptist's golden day.

"He visioned afar through the years a dawn of ineffable
splendor,
A day when all wrongs should be righted, and nations
should be in accord,
A time when all hands should be kind, when all hearts
should be loving and tender.
So he cried through the deserts of life, 'Prepare ye the
way of the Lord'."

His joy was complete. Until Jesus came John and his disciples had fasted as an expression of their sadness. But when John's disciples joined Jesus He turned their sadness into gladness, their fasting into feasting. Jesus admitted He was the Bridegroom. The marriage has come, and men are not sad, they do not fast at a wedding; they feast and are glad. So John could say, "this my joy therefore is fulfilled."

V

And yet the time comes when this eagle-eyed prophet is harried by doubt and dark misgiving. It is perhaps eighteen months later, and John is in prison. Sorrow and suffering have come. He is like a caged eagle; no longer allowed to enjoy his accustomed freedom, his spirits droop. Environment is altered; and with the alteration of environment John is an altered man. A man's views are colored by his surroundings. The prophet can no longer revel in the blithesome days of freedom and power. They are gone. Only the memory of them lingers to sicken his soul. The Machaerus days are long and cheerless. The nights are weeks. The prison dampness chills him. The prison darkness fills him. In the solemn solitude of the desert, such as John was used to, the mind feeds on God. But in the solitude of defeat the mind feeds on itself. John had felt the tingle of popularity; he had felt the tonic of success. Victories, one after the other, had crowded in upon him until he had come to have a kind of achievement complex. He had the victory habit. But defeat has come; hope fades, while doubts spawn and multiply. To this child of freedom, this son of passion, life in the dungeon is worse than death. He is deeply perplexed. A big question is slowly but surely taking shape in his mind there in the prison house, "Is this Jesus the Christ, or is He not?" His sky is clouding, his optimism fading, his soul is troubled; John doubts, really and deeply doubts.

All his life he had known the boundless freedom of the desert. He not only loved freedom, but free speech; but the world was not yet ready for either: nor was it any more willing then than now to have its evils exposed. But John had talked up to Herod and got into prison for his hated truth-telling. He was as hale in body as in spirit. In God's out-of-doors he had been toughened and bronzed by the air and sun. But the foul, inhuman Oriental prison undermined his iron physique, and with the sapping of his bodily vigor there came melancholy and misgiving, spiritual decline and unfaith. Paralyzing doubt had its way with him. His faith wavered, and he enquired *why?*

John was misunderstanding Jesus now. He was possessed of the current Messiah belief. He thought when the Messiah came He would make quick work of sin; thought that with an irresistible power He would hurl down wrong from its seat and enthrone right instead. But Jesus had allowed things to take their usual course. He was not correcting the social evils. He was not altering the face of society. He was not making and unmaking kingdoms in a day. He would effect changes, but after the manner of Nature rather than after the manner of men: He would quietly supplant the old with the new and better. But John, like all men, and reformers in particular, was in a hurry: he made much dust and noise. He was disappointed at Jesus' lack of success and his apparent lack of energy. To him such small success was ominous of failure. He had preached a Christ of judgment whose axe was ready to hew away the wrongs of society, whose fan was in His hand—language suggestive of gash and destruction.

The man's conception of Christ's work, therefore, was as yet physical rather than spiritual. He thought the Kingdom of God was to come with observation; that Christ's conquests were to be outward and political rather than inward and moral. All his life he had longed for the Kingdom of God to come in and smite the kingdom of sin. Then Christ had appeared as the seeming fulfilment of his fondest hope. Meantime John was imprisoned but continued to look for the coming in of the reign of righteousness. But the Kingdom seemed not to come. Jesus seemed to be interested in everything more than the establishment of an imposing Jewish state.

VI

Then, too, John was more than puzzled at the way Jesus was dealing with him. He kept hearing through his disciples of the miracles which Jesus worked. Why did He not work one in behalf of

His wronged Forerunner? Why did He leave him in prison? Why did He not strike the vile hand that put him there? John "seemed to be neglected, not only by God above, but by the living Son of God on earth." Jesus went about doing good, but He seemed to be altogether too tame, too undramatic. He had wanted to see "the wrath of the Lamb" displayed, but the Lamb had been too gentle and unresisting.

John had thought that He would put down wrong with a smash. Jesus professed, indeed, to be a king, but He did none of the things which John and the devout Jews expected the King to do. He called Himself the Son of David, but declined to act the rôle of David. He had announced in the synagogue at Nazareth his working principles based on Isaiah's forecast of the Messiah: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of the sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. . . ." He went to where the prophet added: *"and the day of vengeance of our God,"* and stopped—for Jesus would bring the day of peace, not vengeance.

John had taken all this too literally. He was mistaken. Jesus did not wish to smash things, nor would He. He was a king, yes; but the King of Love, not wrath. He would set up a kingdom, but not a kingdom of blood and force built on the sword; no outward kingdom, but an invisible spiritual empire in men's hearts.

The fiery Forerunner was imbued with the Old Testament doctrine of reward and punishment, that God prospers the good *here and now,* and likewise punishes the bad. He believed that Divine judgment was impending over the nation, and that Christ—if He were the King—would make a selection of the good members of the nation, who would be rescued from the coming catastrophe, while the others would be left to their fate.

But Jesus was not acting the rôle of the Messiah-Deliverer. He seemed to pity and pass over sin rather than condemn it after the unsparing manner of the prophet. He was no austere, fasting recluse or holy man. On the contrary, He was feasting with Publicans and companioning with numerous "undesirables." No, the Kingdom was not coming—the kind of kingdom John and the Jews looked for—and worse still, Jesus seemed not to have a shred of interest in the Kingdom.

John could keep silent no longer. He sent two of his disciples to Jesus with the question that was breaking his heart—"Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" Back there at the Jordan he had seen the Spirit of God descend in dove-like radiance upon Jesus' head; in great ecstasy of soul he had pronounced Him "the Lamb of God." Could he have been mistaken? He must have an answer from Jesus Himself.

It has been observed of the heroic figures of the Bible that their worst failures were made in the things for which they were remarkable. For instance, David is noted for his worshipful spirit. His heart pants for God as the heart of the beast, when pursued and hot, pants for the cooling stream. And yet it is this same reverent, worshipful David who so sins at times that communion with God is impossible.

Elijah is famed for his courage and might. He was an iron man, a flaming spirit, a rugged character, the very embodiment of strength. He strikes you as being superior to human weakness. One day he puts his finger in King Ahab's face and makes that face grow pale. He prays and it rains no more. He prays again and the earth is refreshed with drenching showers. Alone and unaided he defeats four hundred fifty heathen prophets on Mount Carmel. And when done with life here, he does not pass out like other men, by the gloomy road of death, but is carried home in the aeroplane of Heaven. No, Elijah is no weak or ordinary person. The word that best describes him is *power*.

And yet it was Elijah who gave way, on one occasion, to a strange weakness. Look at him: after defeating four hundred fifty men, he is flying for his life from a single woman! Picture him yonder on the grim road that leads down to the wilderness. Where is his courage now? Listen to him as he piles down there under a juniper tree and whines and pines. His faith has turned to fear, his courage to cowardice, his towering strength to weakness. He frets and fumes and breaks his heart; he wants to die: "It is enough, now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." And so we come to agree with the apostle James, that "Elijah was a man of like nature as we are." But this was not the *real* Elijah; and this was not the *real* John either: this was John *wavering*.

VII

We have spoken of the resemblance John bears to Elijah in his strength. We have seen how like that great man he is in courage and character. Like him John is rigidly righteous, grave, sincere, austere. He is the last of the old line prophets and the greatest; the last and most celebrated exponent of the Moses Code. When multitudes flock to hear him he meets them with the scourges of inexorable law. As has been said, "He had no philosophy to temper his impact upon evil, no poetry to gild his unpolished words." He was no apostle of "sweetness and light." His speech was the reverse of diplomatic. Hear him lash the bigoted religious leaders of his day: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" He twits them for their dead formalism—these men who eventually killed Jesus for His biting words, and might have killed him. And, like Elijah, as we have seen, he dared to rebuke his king.

No man ever did a bolder thing than John did that day in the cruel court of Herod Antipas.

The preaching and personality of John had attracted the attention of Herod; he had invited him to preach at the court. The preacher would have kept in the good graces of the king if he had kept his finger off his sins. Prudence, a smooth or flattering tongue, and a more suave and diplomatic handling of the situation, on this occasion, would have saved John no end of trouble and his head to boot. Why was he not more cautious and less blunt? But John was no flattering cleric mouthing ambiguous or flowery phrases, but a man full of the love of truth, who would rather break than bend. The redoubtable preacher told the king plainly it was not right for him to do as he was doing. John would rather be right than popular. Never before so moved, he threw caution to the wind. Though the prophet who uttered the reproof was a poor prisoner in a lonely fortress where, at the monarch's whim, he might be put to the headman's axe, yet his mien was so impressive that the tetrarch was overawed. Timid and cowardly though he was, would he suffer such brazen defiance of himself, such insult to his wife? What a brave soul John was!

> "Oh, fear not in a world like this,
> And thou shalt know ere long—
> Know how sublime a thing it is
> To suffer and be strong."

And yet, as has been said, when Providence seemed to frown, this peerless prophet wilted and wavered. Once more, how like Elijah he is there in his gloomy cell! Like him, the cause for which he had lived, and soon would die, seemed not to prosper. The wish to live was gone. He was haunted ever by the question, "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another."

How did Jesus handle John's question? He did not censure him for lack of faith. He understood perfectly his difficulty.

In effect Jesus said to the messengers of John who came with the question: "You stay around for a while; keep your eyes and ears open." That day they listened to the words of Jesus and saw His works.

Under His touch they saw the blind receive their sight; they saw the lame rise up and walk; they saw the leper cleansed of his loathsome disease; they saw the faces of the poor light up with an unaccustomed glory as Jesus preached the gospel to them. Then said Jesus to John's disciples, "Go back to your master in the prison there and tell him what you have seen; the lame walk, the blind see, the lepers are cleansed, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them." Jesus did not send John a logical or theological argument asserting that He was the Messiah, though He could have done that. He might have shown him how He fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies. He might have dwelt at length on His many miracles as the sure proof of His Messiahship. But He did not. He lead John to see that He was building a *spiritual Kingdom* which was what He had come among men to do.

When the wavering Baptist heard these things, I believe that his suspicions went to sleep. Anyhow, we hear no more of his doubts. At last John saw and understood the true character of the King and His Kingdom, and went to his execution, we may well believe, completely satisfied.

VIII

With John the Jewish age expired; with him the Christian Era was born. He marked the consummation of the old and the beginning of the new. In this gaunt, fearless, uncompromising figure the tides had met, and where the tides meet it is always rough.

"When old things terminate and new commence
One solitary great man's worth the world:
God takes the business into His own hands
At such a time."

The Baptist was one of those solitary great men. He was one of the great pivotal personalities of history. He was the fine product of Israel's best tradition. In him the best tendency of the age was perfected. In point of time he was the first Christian. He was the first to sense the true character of Jesus. Others believed in Jesus after they saw His miracles and heard His words, after they had walked with Him. The Baptist enjoyed no such advantages; yet he believed. Others had seen the Master in the daylight; John had seen Him only in the twilight of the morning. He was the prophet of the dawn. At the beginning he said, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." He saw *then,* notwithstanding his later wavering under severe trial, what all others saw only at the *end.*

But what a true bit of psychology the Evangelists have given us in this prison experience of John! Good men have been known to rebuke kings, face the fiery ordeal of the stake and all manner of physical torture with unswerving fidelity, but when placed in the frightful ancient prisons, to languish, and for a time, give way. St. Jerome of Prague was so tortured in the inhuman prison at Constance that his faith failed and he recanted; but when free and well again, he took up once more his fierce rôle as a crusader of Christ. Had he been spared, John would have been the most understanding, the paramount disciple of Jesus.

"God give us men! A time like this demands
Strong minds, great hearts, true faith and willing hands;
Men whom the lust of office does not kill;
Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy;
Men who possess opinions and a will;

Men who have honor; men who will not lie;
Men who can stand before a demagogue
And damn his treacherous flatteries without winking;
Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog
In public duty and private thinking!
For while the rabble with their thumb-worn creeds,
Their large professions and their little deeds
Mingle in selfish strife, Lo! Freedom weeps!
Wrong rules the land and waiting Justice sleeps."[1]

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[1] *Poems, J. G. Holland,* Charles Scribner's Sons.

CHAPTER II

PETER: FROM SHIFTING SAND TO SOLID ROCK

"Thou art Simon the Son of John: thou shalt be called Cephas, which means a stone."—John 1:42.

"Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."—Matthew 16:18.

I

Peter is you; Peter is myself; Peter is each of us. No man among the Twelve of Jesus is so loved, so censured, so understood or misunderstood as Peter, because none is so paradoxical or human as he. His utter humanness is one of his chief attractions. There is in him a strain of impetuous rashness, a thirst of wild adventure which makes him reckless at times. Strange mixture is Peter! Mixture of caution and recklessness; of stern, high-souled devotion and weakness; the noblest and most ignoble qualities set in strange and unusual juxtapositions in the same person. He is so uncanny, so glib, yet so sincere; so weak, yet so strong; so sure of himself, yet failing and falling so often as to cause alarm. He is first hopeful, then filled with despair; a man of grins and groans; first timid, then very bold. He is now most promising, now disappointing in the extreme. At first he is blind, but soon he out-sees all others. He is dense and slow of heart, yet teachable and quick to comprehend. Sometimes he is vacillating, at others sublimely staunch. He is pugnacious, yet peace-loving and kind; forward and frank, yet tender of heart as a child; impulsive and headstrong, yet quick to alter when shown to be wrong.

Peter was blunt and practical and unimaginative. He could not have written a book like the Revelation, for by his very nature he was incapable of seeing such visions. As Drummond has said, he was naturally the coarsest of all the disciples. A strong-built, sun-tanned, robust fisherman; fearless in disposition, quick-tempered and rash, a man who would bluster and swear, a wild man who had the making of a memorable sinner had not God made him a memorable saint.

Nowadays we try to live two days in one and fail to get one day's real enjoyment. Peter was easy-going and lived happily: he got the juice out of life day by day as he went along.

In his native temperament, Peter was placidly optimistic, chatty, extremely talkative; one might say, torrential in speech; but while he was unusually talkative—nay, self-assertive and contentious at times—yet his talk was never futile or aimless. Curt and taciturn he was sometimes, due to his blundering zeal; but even in his curtness there was no vestige of the snob. Though usually animated and voluble, buoyant and impetuous, yet he was genial and lovable. Though high-strung, he was spacious-hearted, generous, and free from greed as a nightingale. His was a cordial temperament.

But impulse was the only law this lawless spirit knew. The ordered decorum of a Thomas was no part of his makeup. Affable? yes, but by no means always discreet. His conduct was often far from prudent; his talk sometimes bordered on the caustic; he was not always sweet-tempered; and, in the early stages of his discipleship, he was full of a feverish energy which accomplished little.

Peter was noted for his easy assurance: for what we would call, nowadays, "cheek"; and, while much of the time desultory, he was uncommonly placid and punctual. With him it was action, again action, and always action. Energy flowed from him in brimming abundance. His nature partook generously of both the mundane and the celestial, was a mixture of flesh and blood and heavenly hues. But piety in him was not so much innate as acquired.

His manner was bluff, his thinking crude; he was now awkward and ungraceful, now charm and grace itself: but his was a nature to be refined under the tutorage of Christ. Peter had a good brain; he possessed an inquisitive and capacious mind, though he had a still better heart. He was never stiff, never destitute of warmth, never stale. Too much light and too little heat: and the finest natures are spoilt.

Peter's figure—if we may credit traditions—was vigorous, firm-boned, low-built, stout and stocky. He was fat, broad-shouldered, and jolly; an inventor of good cheer. He came of robust fisherfolk; was ardent in temperament, strongly individualistic, yet eminently social. Indecision was no part of his native make-up. He learned to swim by jumping into deep water.

Peter often takes you by surprise; he is unexpected, sometimes quaint and amusing. His manner was winsomely natural, unaffected and hearty—always entirely devoid of pose. He was a great favorite, the ringleader of the Twelve. Jesus early saw in him the outcroppings of an interesting and precocious genius.

It was Peter who was first to enroll as a disciple of Jesus, and the first, alas! to deny Him. Peter was a man of powerful spirit; a man of rare downcasting and uprising; a man subjected to perverse moods of alternate enthusiasm and melancholy. He is first in the heights of ecstasy, then in the depths of despair. He rose so high on one occasion that Jesus said, "Blessed art thou Simon"; yet on the very next day he fell so low that Jesus said, "Get thou behind me Satan".

Peter loved his Master better than all else, he declared he would go with Him anywhere, die for Him; yet when danger came, courage gave way to cowardice, and Peter sulked off. In the Upper Room on that last night he said though all men should forsake Jesus, that he never would; yet only a few hours later he disowned Him with ugly oaths. He who had braved the wiles of a fisherman's life, quailed before a harmless maid. He had seen miracles, witnessed great transformations, heard fervent and efficacious prayers, yet in the hour of the trial of Jesus—and his own—he lied and cursed, saying he did not even know who Jesus was. There is no such twin life, no such checkered history in the New Testament as Peter's.

Peter is at once timorous and courageous, simple and complex, cowardly and fearless, aggressive and halting. He is first heroic then weak, cocksure then uncertain, bold then backward. He is first heartening, then discouraging; optimistic and doubtful, confident and fearful, up and down; now staunch, now recanting, boastful, then self-depreciating, firm and unsteady, forward and self-abasing. He was blustering, yet calm, panicky yet composed, quick-tempered yet tranquil, superficial yet profound; quick to leap, quick to regret, sensitive, mistrustful, suspicious, yet sturdy, trustful and believing.

He caused his Master more anxiety, yet inspired in him more solid hope than any other disciple. Satan desired to have them all, but Jesus felt moved to pray especially for Peter, so uncertain was he. There was in him the making of a noble man, but he was not easily made, and his making cost Jesus dear. He was at times steady and full of promise, at others wayward, wilful, and disheartening; yet in sublime faith Jesus said He would build His Church on him.

II

This is the man that Peter was when Jesus found him—and the Master was sadly aware of his fickleness—, but this is not the man he *is to be*. "Thou art Simon the son of John; thou shalt be called Cephas, A Stone." Peter is anything but a stone now; he is a heap of shifting sand, in fact; yet by the grace and power of Christ this heap of sand shall be fused into a solid rock. Peter is a *"becoming."* So says the optimistic Jesus.

Christ gave the fickle Simon a new name to live up to: "Thou shalt be called Peter"—*petros,* a rock, from which comes our word "petrify". Every time Jesus spoke to Peter after his renaming He called him "a rock". Doubtless the townsmen laughed to think that Jesus was calling Simon a rock; but from the first Simon was encouraged to try, and Jesus to believe that he would make good. To be trusted by such as Jesus!—that put stamina and courage into him. In the school of Christ his wavering, uncertain nature was slowly assuming strength and poise. "Thou art Peter, a rock, and on this rock I will build my Church."

Peter's life mirrors our own. In one or the other facets of his multiple character men of all kinds and temperaments may see themselves. "He was so human," says one admirer, "So like the rest of us in everything, that his history comes near to our own; and the glimpses we have of his spiritual experiences seem like glimpses into the depths of our own human hearts. His biography more easily than that of the other apostles can be rewritten as the autobiography of the common man. More people feel at home with him than with any other member of the group. His impetuosity, candor, honesty, and purity of motive; his impulsiveness, enthusiasm, good nature, appeal strongly to our hearts. And yet we have never been admonished to be like Peter. We have been exhorted to be like Paul, John or Daniel, but not like *Peter.* Peter was the best loved, but he was too frank, too unadorned in speech and soul, too much his raw self to be the most admired. He was alarmingly natural.

Peter is the Jacob of the New Testament, often cast down with a sense of sin, yet penitent and never remaining for long away from God's face. He is the Luther of the apostles, sometimes hasty, angry, violent, yet dominated by a faith which defies man, hell, and weathers every storm. He is a man of splendid initiative, coupled with great daring. Once he leaps into the raging sea to meet Jesus. At another time he strikes an officer, sent to arrest Jesus, cutting off his ear before he can catch himself, though he fully meant to cut off his head. Someone has said, "The effeminate shall not enter the Kingdom of God." There was nothing effeminate about Peter, though he was by no means always steadfast.

There was nothing icy about Peter; rather he was a leaping flame. He was, as Chrysostom said, "the mouth of the apostles." He often fell into blundering ways; was often given to unconsidered address. As contrasted with John of the mystic vision, or Thomas of the probing mind, he strikes one at first as a raw, superficial man. He had no faculty for keeping cool; none, apparently, for thinking deep things through. He was always being swept away by a gust of emotion.

But better a flaming blunderer, blundering honestly in the direction of right, than a host of timid, correct ones frozen to inactivity in their virtues; for, as Browning somewhere says, "Ice makes no conflagration." Peter was sometimes more smoke than flame, and sometimes his flame, as is likely with flame, was but an inconsistent and futile flare; but he was never guilty of doing things by halves. Christ took Peter (and so He takes any man) as he was. He took his violent passions, and without repressing them, redirected and reinvested them in new purposes. There was little tendency to lukewarmness in Peter. This Jesus knew; and He knew, moreover, that the Kingdom of God could not well get on without just such qualities as Peter had. He was both human and divine enough to know that after all, as Shakespeare said, "Best men are moulded out of faults."

Peter enjoys the closest intimacy with Jesus. Jesus puts up at his house, preaches from his boat, heals his wife's mother (to Peter Christ must have been the Great Physician indeed); He teaches him, constantly praises him for his insight and devotion, rebukes him for his rashness and pugnacity. But Peter, being always teachable, was amenable to reproof, and was never grumpy or sullen. He makes of Peter an example to us. He shows us in His training of him how we may become fitted for discipleship. His treatment of this blundering man reveals something of His patient wisdom, boundless charity, and matchless friendship toward us all.

III

Peter is the most representative of the apostles. His many words and acts not only let us see the kind of man he was, but they set all the Twelve in bold relief before us. His words and acts declared him, and in these Jesus from the beginning read the very soul of the man; perceived what he was and what he was capable of becoming, and announced that he should bear the name *Peter* or *rock*.

Peter's resourcefulness made him at once the recognized leader of the new society. He was their spokesman. No other disciple speaks so often and so much. He best understood both them and Jesus, and could best interpret their hopes to Jesus and Jesus' mind to them. The many occasions on which Peter takes the lead as spokesman of the hour reveal the ardor of his spirit and the primacy of his ideas, as well as the unfailing impulsiveness of the man.

At one moment he exclaims in sheer self-depreciation, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," and in the next beseeches the Master to remain close to him always. He declares in one hour, "Lord, I will go with thee anywhere, even to death," and in the next disowns his Saviour passionately. On a day at Caesarea up in Philipp's Province, when all men were debating who Jesus was, Jesus asked the disciples who men said He was: "Who do men say that I am?" They replied, "Elijah," "Moses," "John the Baptist," "Jeremiah," or "one of the prophets". Then Jesus put the pertinent question to them personally, "But whom say *ye* that I am?"

Like the people, they were not ready to say; they would rather think it over for a while and report later, but Peter, without a moment's hesitation, affirmed that He was the Messiah: "Thou are the Christ," he said, "the Son of the living God." It was one of Peter's blazing moments out of which had leaped his passionate personal faith.

This bold confession of His deity and unique appreciation of His essential nature filled the heart of Jesus with ecstasy and so pleased Him that He commended Peter in the highest terms. "Blessed art thou Simon son of John," He said, and declared that Peter in coining the first comprehensive creed of the Church, was then and there indwelt by God. Yet just a little later, as we have seen, when Jesus speaks of His coming suffering and death, and Peter rebukes Him, Christ addresses him as the incarnation of Satan.

At every turn Peter's impulsiveness is glaringly in evidence. At the Last Supper he vows though all men be offended at Jesus, yet will he never be; but soon the Master sorrowfully announces that it is he who is about to deny Him thrice, but Peter blissfully missed, apparently, the point of this remark. And when Christ begins to wash the disciples' feet, Peter falls to talking as usual in his inimitable chatty manner: "Lord, thou shalt never wash my feet," yet in the next breath he pleads pathetically, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." When Jesus is arrested, Peter follows Him to the High Priest's court and there, weary and perplexed, taken off his guard, unmanned, he asserts that he knows nothing of Him.

Peter's persistent fickleness is seen in his great experience at Joppa. In a vision he saw a lot of four-footed beasts which to a Jew were unclean for food. But he heard a voice saying, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." It was a new thing in religion, and Peter in a scandalized tone said, "Lord, I have never done this thing before. I have never gone beyond the recognized bounds of orthodoxy and good usage. I have never eaten anything common or unclean," meaning that he was never in his life associated with a Gentile. The vision taught Peter to no longer rate Jew above non-Jew; taught him that God cares nothing for our artificial distinctions between races and religions. Christ at last had broken through Peter's narrow creed. But this was after the Ascension.

IV

Before Pentecost Peter was ever forward and unyielding, and always hasty. Here are some instances: Peter asserting as a matter of course that Jesus would pay the Temple tax; Peter attempting to regulate the conduct of the Messiah; Peter at the Transfiguration wanting to build three tabernacles; Peter striving with James and John for the premier position in the Kingdom, which they thought Jesus would soon establish; Peter refusing to allow his Master to degrade Himself by washing his feet; Peter unable to restrain his sorrow and impatience when Jesus announces that one of their number will betray Him, but signals John to ask who it is; Peter denying Christ, swearing, then breaking into a flood of hot tears when Jesus looks at him; Peter running to the sepulchre and entering when John hesitates to do so; Peter saying after the crucifixion, when his hopes lay buried with Jesus in the grave, "I go a-fishing." During these days so beclouded with tragedy, the salt of the little sea and the smell of her fish came with more than the old appeal to Peter's nostrils. He turned once more toward the beckoning shores. Once more he fared forth to revel in the fury of the quaint little sea.

Before Pentecost Peter is always the same—impulsive, affectionate, easily disheartened, often failing, yet always returning to loving allegiance to his Master.

Peter, always strong, vehement, self-assertive, was at the first by no means a saint. Some have thought he must have been a fiery and uncontrollable youth, a mischievous boy who frightened his mother and angered his father by his boyish pranks, and one imagines that "Simon was by turns sullen and spiteful". However this may be, as a young man he must have been hot-blooded, high-tempered, passionate, with little or no predilection for sainthood. He was probably accustomed to swearing, or else he would not have so easily taken to the dishonorable business on the betrayal night when he stood warming himself by the fire in Caiaphas' judgment hall; for when accused by the maid of being a disciple of Jesus, he "cursed and swore and said, I know him not." He was fickle, fearful, erratic; first warm, fervent, hot, like the fire by which he warmed himself that fateful night, then cold as the snows of Hermon; first like the shaggy and firm ice, then like the formless water when the ice has melted. Peter was a nervous wreck when he reached the hall of justice; then he crashed.

It seems incredible that this man of sand shall ever become the rock-man of the prophecy of Jesus. "Son of John" means a dove. Jesus is saying, "Thou art the son of a dove, but in my hands thou shalt become the man of rock." But will this timorous and weak-as-water man come to have the constancy of a rock? To change the figure, Peter was a block of rough-hewn and shapeless stone, but locked up in that stone was an angel which none but the genius of Jesus could liberate, yet under the touch of the Master Sculptor it would begin forthwith to take on shape—and did.

Jesus looked for virtues in most unlikely places and found them. He found generosity in greedy, extortionate Zacchæus; He found potential purity as well as passion in Mary of Magdala; He found idealism in the breast of Matthew the outcast Publican. He knew better than any other that deep in the subconscious soul of every man, though buried and inarticulate at times it may be, there is a secret hunger for God and goodness; knew

> "That far and wide though all unknowing
> Pants for God each mortal breast."

He believed in the innate goodness of human nature, and did not despise any because of his sins.

Peter was a man of oceanic impulse. He was the creature of the moment; he acted without reflection. Did Jesus ask, "Who say ye that I am?" the others were ready to think about it for a while, and after calm, judicious reflection to formulate a creed. But all Peter's warm affection, the ripe fruit of his intercourse with Jesus, surged forth like the outburst of a geyser. Instantly he burst forth, "Thou art the Messiah." It was a great confession, it told the truth and won the Master's warmest approval.

A few hours later Jesus started on his last journey to Jerusalem. It was a solemn hour. He drew aside the veil and revealed the rugged Cross. "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected of the elders, . . . and killed." It was the first time the Cross had cast its dark shadow athwart their sunny path. Peter was shocked and amazed. The One whom he had just confessed to be the Messiah (and had not Jesus confirmed the confession?) to come to suffering, shame, death!

That the Messiah could suffer at all was unthinkable to Peter. Moreover, was not the Messiah to be a Divine Conqueror? How could such a thing be? His whole nature revolted; his soul flashed fire, and with his usual candor and impetuosity he broke in with sharp remonstrance: "Let nothing of this sort happen to thee, Lord! This shall never be—not while reason holds her throne shall this happen—not while courage and strength are left in my being—not while I have a sword to draw in thy defense:—this shall *never* be." He knew that Jesus knew more and better than he; but he acted on the impulse of the moment, without thinking, as we so often do. Jesus reprimanded him sharply: "Get thou behind me Satan: thou art a stumbling-block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." The manner of Jesus, though usually kindness itself, was now one of restrained indignation. Poor Peter was chilled to the marrow, unhorsed, defeated; but he found nothing but pleasure in his defeat, so much a man was he. He was one of the most teachable of men, being possessed of a great wish to learn, an insatiable itch to know. Though an uncommonly forward and firm man, yet he was reasonable, and became docile and malleable beyond all others. He often staggered Jesus by his ill-considered proposals, as when, for example, he suggested the building of three tabernacles on the Transfiguration Mount.

Peter might be all right one moment, and all wrong the next. He was much like the Sea of Galilee upon which he had spent his life as a fisherman—peaceful and placid in one hour, and lashed into a sudden fury of tempest in the next. He is first the mouthpiece of God, then the voice of Satan. You could never tell what Peter would do next.

Says Dean Brown, "He was made up in such a way that the connection between his feelings and his will were close. He was quick on the trigger. His reactions came in spurts. The moment he felt an impulse, he was on his feet suiting his action to that mood. He moved first, and thought it over later. . . . Such men are always striking twelve either in some high noon of glorious action or in some midnight of dismal failure. It is never nine o'clock in the morning or three in the afternoon with them—they are at one extreme or the other."[1] Unlike Thomas, Peter was not too cool or cautious. He had the divine foolishness which real discipleship requires. He gladly became the fool for his ideal's sake.

A controversy arises between Jesus and the Jews. Jesus makes some rather drastic demands, and even His followers go away in droves. The clouds were gathering. Nazareth had cast Him out. Capernaum has rejected Him. Will all the people turn against Him? By ones and twos, then by groups they thinned away. First the hot-headed politicians, the opportunists, then the crowd of bread-seekers who hoped for another meal, then the shallow bigots who were shocked at His demand that they eat His body and drink His blood, which even if taken spiritually, they said, was making Himself God. All these "went back and walked no more with Him."

Jesus looked at His disciples and said wistfully, "Will ye also go away?" Peter was never grander; he knew that the soul of man must go somewhere, to someone outside itself, and greater, for the life-giving bread, so he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life!" "'Tis life of which our souls are scant."

V

Peter was a lovable man. Everybody liked him. Jesus liked him; the other apostles liked him; the members of the early Church liked him; and we like him, because he is so much like ourselves.

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[1] *These Twelve,* pages 4 and 12.

Peter was openly honest. There was no artificiality or pretense in him. His soul looked through. He never went masquerading. He was ever just Peter. He had not Paul's head, nor John's heart, Mary's mysticism, or James's stable saintliness, but he was at once the most heady, hearty, loyal and human of all the apostles. He exhibited freely all the frailties of our humanity, and was a better example of the growth in grace than all his associates.

Jesus rebuked Peter often, 'tis true; Paul rebuked him to his face, yet both esteemed him highly. Peter repented, and Jesus forgave him, Paul forgave him—everybody else forgives him. Oh, the repentance of Peter! that was what saved him. Luther once said, "If I could paint a portrait of Peter, I would paint upon every hair of his head, 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins'." Peter's faults were not radically faults of the heart. He might seem, as James puts it, restless and unstable as the sea, but that was only on the surface of his character. Down deep in his nature there was a sincerity and right purpose which endears him to all.

And how Peter loved Jesus! It was love that prompted his most foolish conduct, as well as his most gallant deeds. It was love that made him leave his net in the water and follow Jesus; it was love that made him plunge later into that same sea to meet Jesus again. Love prompted the great confession, and love prompted the speech that brought the great rebuke. Love caused him to brandish his sword in defense of his Master when ruffians attacked Him in the Garden of Olives. And it was love—love that would not let him go—that moved him to follow Jesus into the High Priest's chamber where He was on trial. Peter thought he might be of some help to Jesus there. "Lord, I will go with thee *anywhere*"—Peter meant it, though he so sadly failed. Already wavering and nigh over-borne, he was asserting none the less his unfailing fidelity to Jesus. The agony of his struggle was plainly written on his brow; flesh and spirit were in deadly conflict. He was jaded and spent. When taunted by the maiden with being a friend of the Galilean he stoutly denied it. With characteristic gusto, with denial tantamount to treason, he averred that he knew nothing of Him or Galilee. In Thomas Hardy's dramatic words he said:

"Nay, nay, you teasing wench, I say! You know you speak mistakenly.
Cannot a tired pedestrian who has footed it afar
Here on his way from northern parts engrossed in humble marketings,
Come in and rest a while, although judicial doings are
Afoot by morning star?"

But he had the Galilean Accent: that gave him away—

"O, come, come!" laughed the constable. "Why, man, you speak the dialect
He uses in His answers; you can hear Him up the stairs.
So own it. We shan't hurt ye. There He's speaking now! His syllables
Are those you sound yourself when you are talking unawares,
As this pretty girl declares." [1]

Once more Peter's fear and quick temper had unmanned him. His boastful pledge of unfailing loyalty, made but a few hours before returned to haunt him like a spectre now. Peter a rock? nay; shifting sand. He felt himself the basest of men. Christ knew the plight he was in, and feared to speak or even whisper to him, lest He utterly crush his now so sensitive spirit. He turned and merely *looked*. It was a look of profound disappointment, yet of tenderest sympathy, but it broke Peter's heart. It was

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[1] *Anthology of Jesus,* Sir James Marchant, *Ed.,* Harper & Brothers. (Hardy Est., Dorchest., Eng.)

"The wounded Saviour's tender look
Which Peter's spirit shook."

The crowing of the cock did the rest. The words of Christ, "Thou shalt deny me thrice—but I have prayed for thee," came to mind, the one to distress, the other to comfort him greatly. Peter went outside and wept profusely. Tradition says that in the years after the denial, whenever Peter heard a cock crow he would fall on his knees and weep. I should think he might; but remain prostrate in the dust only long enough to recall the singular grace of God which had forgiven and restored him. At this juncture Peter might fittingly have voiced the words of the hymn which says—

"Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home."

And I doubt not that Peter heard the *same* cock's crow of that memorable night often resounding in his memory's ear.

"Peter and James and John,
The sad tale runneth on—
By the priest's fagot hot,
I said I knew thee not.

The little maid spake out:
'With Him thou wentest about.'
'This man I never met—'
I hear the cock crow yet.' "[1]

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[1] *Selected Poems,* Lizette Woodworth Reese, Doubleday, Doran & Co.

CHAPTER III

PETER: FROM SHIFTING SAND TO SOLID ROCK. (Continued)

I

When we first come upon Simon Peter he is fishing on the lake of Galilee. This whole section is redolent of fish. These parts seem to have been densely populated in Jesus' day, and the little sea was just as full of fish as its shores were of people. One of the largest towns in the Galilee of that day, Taricheae, means "dried fish." Magdala, the city of Mary Magdalene, means "the tower of fish"; Bethsaida, the city of Peter and Andrew, means "house of fish." Fish was easily king of these parts. Hundreds of men, therefore, had full-time employment in those days fishing and handling fish in Galilee. As already said, Peter, with several others who became disciples of Jesus, were fishermen. He with Andrew, his brother, owned a fishmarket and sold fish, it may be, throughout Palestine.

When Jesus called this burly grappler with the treacherous sea He spoke the language he best knew. To Peter and others He said, "Follow me and I will make you to *become* fishers of men. You have been successful at catching fish, hereafter you shall catch men."

Peter owned a home and lived with his wife and mother-in-law in Capernaum, the most important town on the lake, when Jesus passed along and called him and Andrew, and James and John, two other fishermen, to follow Him. As has been said, Peter's house became the headquarters of Jesus during His preaching in Galilee. No wonder Peter became the most intimate, save one, of all Jesus' disciples.

Peter from first to last is the most conspicuous figure among the Twelve. His name stands first in every list of the apostles. He was one of the Big Three intimates of the Master and here again always first—"Peter, James and John." He was later one of the three "pillars" of the Church. He is mentioned by one or the other of his names more than one hundred and sixty times in the New Testament. He was the first to be invited to accompany the new Teacher, and the first to put away his business to do so.

Peter was first in so many ways: the first to conceive Jesus as the Divine Son of God and Messiah of Israel; the first to be told of the resurrection of Jesus, and the first to believe and acclaim Him risen from the dead. "Go your way, tell His disciples *and* Peter," said the messenger of resurrection morning to those first at the empty grave. "He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve," says Saint Paul. Peter needed to see Jesus first, and Jesus wanted to see Peter first. John was first at the empty tomb, being the younger he outran Peter; but where John halted at the grave's edge, fearing to enter, Peter rushed in. John was first to identify the solitary figure on the shore of the Sea of Galilee on that memorable morning with their risen Master, but Peter was first to try to reach Him. After the Ascension, it was Peter who first proposed the election of a successor to Judas Iscariot. He was first also to throw open the door of the Church to the Gentiles, thus making the first non-Jewish converts to Christ. At Pentecost, Peter is a figure of the first magnitude. He remained the chief authority, the leading personality in the Church, the prince of the apostles, until eclipsed by the rising figure of Saint Paul; after that he fades out of the New Testament picture.

No sooner has Peter founded the Church at Corinth, Antioch, and Caesarea, where he baptised Cornelius, than he drops out of the story. The giant figure of Saint Paul rises to pre-eminence, while Peter quickly declines. But there could always be found many who would swear by Peter. There was a party in the Church at Corinth who kept on saying, "We are of Cephas."

Eusebius, the Church's first great historian, says that Peter went to Rome, where he founded the Church there, and approved of Mark's Gospel (Mark's Gospel is Peter's Gospel: he wrote it apparently under Peter's guidance); and that he was "crucified at Rome head downward, for so he desired to die." It is said that Peter refused to be crucified with his head up, saying he was unworthy to die like his Lord. That is not hard to believe of Peter, so reverent and manly was he. The story is that when persecution broke out at Rome Peter was there. He saw strong men burned and thrown to the lions for their faith. His old weakness rushed in upon him again. He was tempted to get away. Then, too, the Christians besought him to go, because his life was of such great value to them. Accordingly he started to leave and met Christ entering Rome carrying His cross. When he asked, "Lord, why goest thou hither?" the answer was, "I go to Rome to be crucified." At this Peter, overwhelmed with remorse, returned to the city to die, as Jesus had foretold he finally would. (John 21:18-19).

Thus Peter and Paul, the Church's two great lights, both perished—if tradition be true—in Rome.

First one then the other has enjoyed the supremacy. During the life of the Lord, it was Peter; in the early Church, it was Peter. But when the Church went empiring, it was Paul. If the Church ever had a pope in the first apostles, it was Paul, not Peter. Peter was married and had the aid of his wife in the work of the Church; Paul never was: he was the model celibate, rather inclined to depreciate women. If Peter was the first pope then the later popes have departed sadly from apostolic precedent in the matter of marriage. When Paul is in need of advice, he goes to James, the Lord's brother, bishop of Jerusalem, not to Peter. It was Paul who rebuked Peter at Antioch, not Peter, Paul. After their death both were especially honored by great churches built to their names, St. Peter's and St. Paul's. But the tables are turned again. From their death on, Peter increases; Paul decreases, till "the apostle of the circumcision" completely outshines —in tradition—"the apostle to the Gentiles." In Roman tradition and the Roman Communion Peter is still supreme.

II

Let us come back to Peter's great confession of Christ and His commission to the apostle.

When Peter acclaimed Jesus the Messiah, Jesus addressed that apostle in language, at once striking and hard to understand: "Happy art thou Simon son of John, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say unto thee, Thou art PETROS (a little stone) and upon this Rock (PETRA) I will build my Church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven and what thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and what thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matt. 16:18-19).

An age-long controversy has raged about this passage. What was "this Rock" on which Christ would build His Church? It is not easy to say. Some contend, notably Roman Catholics, that it was Peter himself; others that it was Christ; still others that it was Peter's confession of Christ as Divine.

All these contain truth, but perhaps the whole truth lies with all three interpretations, rather than with any one. Certainly the Church consists of those who own Christ Divine; without that there could be no Church. And certain it is that Christ is the Chief Corner Stone of the Church; without Him the Church could have no sure foundation. But everywhere in the New Testament Peter is given the title "Rock." "Peter" is the Greek for a rock, and "Cephas" is the Aramaic for a rock, and in re-naming Simon Jesus said, "thou shalt be called Cephas (or Peter), which means a rock."

In the Old Testament Rock is frequently applied to God; in the New, Paul says the Rock which followed Israel in the wilderness was Christ. God, Christ, and Peter, then, are all called "the Rock." What we have here is an ingenious play upon the word "Rock," but is the Rock Christ or Peter?

There is no dodging the fact that Peter is called the Rock. Is Christ to build His Church on Peter, then? Yes, surely, Peter and Peter's confession, and Peter's Lord, all are one and we get into difficulty only when we cling to one and leave the others. The Catholic Church clings to one, and says Peter was the first Pope. But Saint Augustine, the greatest Catholic bishop and church Father, said the Church was built on Christ whom Peter, like all the rest, confessed. Origin, writing in the third century, says, "Every disciple of Christ is a rock . . . and upon every such rock the whole doctrine of the Church and the policy in accordance therewith is built. . . . But if thou supposest that the whole Church," says Origin, "is built by God on that one Peter alone, what wouldst thou say concerning John the son of Thunder, or any one of the apostles? Otherwise shall we dare to say that against Peter especially the gates of hell shall not prevail, but that they shall prevail against the remaining apostles? . . . Are then the keys of the kingdom of heaven given by the Lord to Peter alone and shall none other of the blessed apostles receive them?"

III

Another incident always pressed by those who hold the official primacy of Peter, is the "feed-my-sheep passage."

After His resurrection Jesus meets the disciples again on the shores of Galilee. He asks Peter three times if he loves Him, to which Peter three times replies that he does, and is three times told to feed the flock of God. The remarkable conversation follows: "Simon son of John, lovest thou me more than these?" Note that Jesus addresses him not Peter, but Simon, son of John, as befits his recent denial and present weakness. Simon's bragging spirit, however, is gone now. Humiliating failure has taught him how frail he is; he is humble and wiser than before. Irritation, vanity, self-opinionativeness — where are they now? *Gone!* Peter answers, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee." He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith unto him a second time, Simon son of John, lovest thou me? He saith unto Him, yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He said unto him, Tend my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon son of John, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, lovest thou me? And he said unto Him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

"Feed my lambs," "Be a shepherd to my sheep," "Follow me." Why does Christ give this three-fold injunction to Peter if not to mark him out for primacy? But what He says to Peter, was He not saying to all? At any rate, John and James, Philip and Paul along with Peter laid the foundation of world-wide Christianity.

No, the notion that Peter was ever pope of the Church is a myth; that he was given any official primacy over the other apostles is also doubtful. But there can be no doubt about his natural or personal primacy. To the dazed, disheartened band after the death of Christ he says, "I go a-fishing," and they quickly reply, "We go with thee." Was this the council of despair, or the courage to make the best of a tragic situation? No matter—what we cannot fail to note is that Peter is the leader. At Pentecost, he is the spokesman—as he had always been—and under the hot flood of his eloquence three thousand souls are swept into the Church in one day. Peter dominates the first part of Acts, and for fifteen years following the Ascension, is the most commanding personality in the Church; and he dominates—if not like a pope—like the prince of the apostles that he was. There is rock in his character now—the bedrock of an unflinching faith in his Master. That was the foundation upon which Christ could build. The Church was well founded. Jesus made no mistake in building His Church on Peter and his like.

All along Jesus had kept saying, "Thou are Peter, thou art a rock," when he really was but shifting, inconstant sand; but He said it until this faltering Simon, believing in himself and believing mightily in his Master, became Peter in very deed. His soft and fluid ideas and convictions now hardened into rock. His cowardice was tempered to courage. His doubts became measureless confidence in Jesus; all his hopes regarding Him having been confirmed, he rested on a basis of adamant. He is the rock-like apologist for the New Way. He is a new man, full of a new calm and energy, chastened by a new reverence and awe. See him in Herod Agrippa's prison. It is the night before his execution, supposedly, yet there he is sound asleep. Now a man must have a very good conscience or a very bad one to sleep on such a night as that. He is visited by an angel, awakened, told to dress himself and follow. Keble in *The Christian Year* has pictured this scene thus—

"His dream is chang'd—the Tyrant's voice
  Calls to that last of glorious deeds—
But as he rises to rejoice,
  Not Herod but an Angel leads."

And Peter follows with perfect poise. What has come over this impulsive, fitful apostle? He was always swift to speak, swift to act, always in haste—but not now. The man of quicksand has become the man of solid rock. Jesus was right. Peter did not disappoint Him in the end.

Impulsiveness, pugnacity, impetuosity—this was Peter before Pentecost. Humility, boldness, masterfulness—this is Peter now. "And when the people saw the *boldness* of Peter," they marveled and remembered that he had been with Jesus. When the Jewish officials commanded the apostles to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, Peter flatly refused saying, "We ought to obey God rather than men." The timid disciple has become the bold apostle. The Peter of yesterday, though capable, of robust qualities and very pronounced character, was yet self-willed, forward, and hard to control. Though never normally a coward, he was often far from constant. But what courage, what constancy now!—as if making a conscious atonement for the shameless lapses of the past. Though no longer young, he bears about with him still an air of youthful gaiety and delicious freshness. With redoubled consecration, and clothed with superb energy, he pushes forward in his Master's cause. Recall his somnolence in the Garden, his weakness at the trial of Jesus, and take note of his vigor now! What a difference in Peter before the Sanhedrin *now* and Peter in the High Priest's court *then!* He still has plenty of heat, but it is controlled heat. Instead of having a fiery tongue, he has a tongue of fire; and "he keeps his heat for power." In writing to Christians in trouble, he enjoins them to be "clothed with humility," and talks of boundless love to Christ, and of the "joy unspeakable and full of glory" which comes in serving Him. He who has been "a denier, a deserter, a dastard" is now protagonist, apostle, apologist in earnest.

The growth pains are left behind, the formative period is gone; at long last Peter has passed from apprenticeship to headship. He is the master-leader. We see the man himself in the height of his mature powers as active, eager, and inquiring as had been the young man of the Galilee days. Once the witty and warm-hearted fisherman, Peter is now the grave and staunch apostle; and, though as warm-hearted as ever, he is holier, riper, wiser now. He had been devoted to his Master, the earthly Jesus; but now that Christ was gone, he saw Him through the prism of his full and kindly heart; for him, more than ever, his invisible Master took on divine proportions: no longer was He simply the beloved Rabbi: He was Lord and King: Calvary and the Resurrection had indeed transformed Jesus, and in transforming Jesus, had transformed Peter too. There was but one casual factor in Peter's transition from weakness to power, from crudity to culture: that factor was Christ.

We are glad for Peter; glad that we know as much as we do about him; glad that Christ ever said, "Thou are Peter and on this Rock I will build my Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." Chrysostom, the "golden mouthed" preacher of Constantinople in the fourth century, refers to Peter as "the world-wide fisherman, who brought our race heavenward from the abyss of error."

"O matchless honor, all unsought,
High privilege, surpassing thought
That thou shouldst call us, Lord, to be
Linked in work-fellowship with thee!
To carry out *thy* wondrous plan,
To bear *thy* messages to man;
'In trust,' with Christ's own words of grace
To every soul of human race."

CHAPTER IV

JOHN: FROM SON OF THUNDER TO APOSTLE OF LOVE

"John the brother of James; and them he surnamed Boanerges, which is sons of thunder."—Mark 3:17.

"The disciple whom Jesus loved."—John 21:20.

His Early Life

"John" is the most universal name in history. How well the world knows that name! It was common in the first century, it is more common in the twentieth. As Dean Brown has said, "More babies have been named for St. John than for any other saint or sinner in the whole history of the race."

John the apostle is first introduced to us as a disciple of that other great John called the Baptist. He is a young man of a hot and ardent nature. The stern preacher of the desert was much to his liking. There was a lure about the shaggy prophet which took fast hold on the poetic and passionate soul of the young fisherman. The enterprising, hero-worshipping youth was captivated by the earnest, austere man of God. He liked that plain preaching. He admired that forceful character. He gloried in the independence, freshness, and unafraidness which made John the peerless preacher of his time. With all the zeal of his fervid nature and youthful idealism he espoused the Messianic dreams of the great Forerunner.

John was a part of the Baptist's crusade until Jesus came on the scene; then he followed Him. The reforms of the Baptist were soon squelched. He was committed to Herod's prison at Machaerus where bloody hands were soon to end his life. As he had said it would be, John had decreased, Jesus had increased; and in this the Baptist's hopes seemed fulfilling.

I

After the death of John Jesus came into Galilee preaching and selecting some to be learners of Him and helpers in His work. Walking one day along the Lake of Galilee He summoned two brothers, Simon and Andrew, who were fishermen, promising if they would come after Him, to make them "fishers of men." Under the spell of Jesus' attractive person and preaching, "Stung by the splendour of a sudden thought." they forsook their nets and quickly attached themselves to Him. Going on a little way the Master found two other brothers, James and John, "mending their nets." On being invited to accompany Him, they, too, closed out their fishing business and joined the new Teacher.

So, John was a fisherman and a Galilean, the son and partner of Zebedee, a well-to-do fisherman, who had extensive equipment and several hired men employed in the industry.

Now fishermen are resourceful, original, alert; but unlike shepherds, they are not always brave: they alternate between courage and cowardice. Galilee, the home of John, was a land of much industry, frugality, and independence. The people were noted for their energy and thrift.

But the Galileans were not only enterprising: they were passionate and religious as well. Jesus knew this, and that may have been the reason why He selected all, but one, of his disciples from Galilee. The only one chosen outside of Galilee was Judas Iscariot; and is it not a striking fact that it was he who proved the shameless traitor? It was the man of Kerioth in staid and passionless Judea who was a total misfit in the "School of Christ"; for in his case, the tutelage of Christ utterly failed. Of the Twelve, Judas alone was an obstructor to the program of Jesus, a disappointment, the only one who utterly failed his Master in the end.

Jesus had trouble in taming the vehement spirits of Peter and the "sons of thunder"; but He succeeded with the Galileans, whereas, He had no success with the cool, calculating Judean. Too much heat in religion may not be good, but religion must have heat. Judas had a heart of ice, and there is no place in religion for the icy heart. He could not get excited or enthusiastic about anything. Christ and Judas were incompatible, for to follow Christ is to be enthusiastic. From the very first John attracted attention by his zeal and talent. Energy, enterprise, freshness and alertness of mind were characteristics of his. His personality at this time while not the broadest, was not lacking in edge and point. Already he was a thinker who could grasp truth in its fundamental elements; a regal and devout soul who stood ready to cast in his life and lot with the most regal Personage he had ever seen or heard of. John had unknown storehouses of latent power, mighty reserves of character which he did not dream he possessed until confronted by the emergency which this challenge of Jesus had precipitated in his soul, a fact which is still being attested by many high-visioned, adventurous youths of our day.

In a factory where mariners' compasses are made, before the needles are magnetized they will lie in any position, but when once touched by the mighty magnet, once electrified by that mysterious power, they ever afterward point only in one direction. So, many a young life lies listless, purposeless until touched by the Divine magnet, after which it always points to the north star of its hope and strength.

The Galileans were not up to the minute in culture or business acumen; they were not lacking in native genius; but they were not men of the schools. In Judea and Jerusalem they were spoken of as "unlearned and ignorant" folk. They were unsophisticated men, not too far removed from nature and nature's primitive simplicity to be warmly human and teachable.

"Peter and John"—names which are often conjoined in Holy Writ—were mutually attracted despite their dissimilarities; or, was it because of them? However, the interest of each in Jesus was a common bond. Peter could not be said to possess so pungent a mind as John: John was brilliant: yet, though highly intellectual, he was not lacking in kindly human sympathy—which not infrequently is the case with those possessing superior mentality. He had the grace and purity of a young girl, and a soul of indomitable force.

II

John was called "a son of thunder" not that he was bellowing or raving in speech, but because of his febrile nature and ardent spirit. The name was early bestowed by Jesus, and shows what a true insight the Master had into the character of the man from the beginning. John was intense, a whole-souled man. He was strongly imaginative, spiritual, tender, yet zealous sometimes to the point of harshness. There were days when his mystical soul brooded in the dumb silence of quiet wonder like flowers in the sunshine of the desert. But his was not a passive or composed nature. He was no mealy-mouthed man. Rather he was a child of the storm—fitful and deeply emotional. Upon occasion he could show himself a whirlwind of unbridled enthusiasm.

One day in a passion of anger and excitement he wanted to call down fire upon some inhospitable Samaritans for what he considered a bold insult to Jesus. But the fiery young disciple, Jesus said, had not yet learned of what manner of spirit he was. He was but a spiritual amateur as yet, a lawless mass of feelings. He little knew to what lengths his undisciplined nature, when excited, would carry him. Pleasing and of a gentle demeanor, yet withal he was a man of violent temper.

A fervid spirit coupled with a fierce loyalty to his Master was ever a marked characteristic of John's. When he was an infirm old man, the only original apostle yet living, one day in the city of Ephesus where he lived, he found himself in the same house with one, Cerinthus, a noted heretic. Immediately, it is said, the stout-spirited old man rushed out of the building, saying that he feared to remain in a place which housed such an enemy of Jesus Christ, lest God should be displeased and cause the house to fall upon them.

James and John were correctly called "Boanerges," sons of Thunder. John, especially, was a son of tumult, a man of wrath. There was something electric in his nature. He was always in a passion of some kind or other—a passion of friendship, a passion of love, a passion of anger. His fine nature, like that of a true mother, was at once capable of the purest devotion and the fiercest aversion. There was blended in him a sweetness and strength, a tenderness and toughness altogether sublime. As Farrar says, "He was an impetuous man, but his impetuosity lay in a soul of the most heavenly tenderness, as the lightning slumbers in the dewdrop."

But this is the man—with a spirit fierce and firm—who one day will so ably defend Christ from unbelieving Gnostics who seek to rob Him of his divinity and make Him a mere man. It took men of John's character to plant the Church in pagan soil and make it grow. None but a mind like John's could have coined such a phrase as "the wrath of the Lamb"—a phrase born of an intense love of truth and a consuming hatred of every false way.

"Youth's a staff that won't endure," say the wise. This young man, dreamy when at peace, but fierce when stirred, was forefated, of course, to rashness on occasion, even strange caprices; yet Jesus knew him for a diamond of the purest water. He had courage befitting one called to a life of apostleship and combat: and it was his lot to suffer much; but always he was clothed with the optimism born of trial, and to the end possessed of a faith which no misfortune could quell.

But from the first Jesus saw the peril, as well as the promise, in John. But I think He gladly took the risk. If there is anything which Christ cannot countenance in His followers it is a lack of enthusiasm. John had enthusiasm. It was enthusiasm, boundless and uninformed, which made him want to call down fire that day upon the churlish Samaritans for rejecting Jesus. His intolerance and ill-will on this occasion were sad defects in a fine quality—strong conviction. There is a tolerance common to-day which is due to lack of purpose. Many have no strong conviction to be intolerant about. Theirs is the tolerance of the jelly-fish which strikes at nothing because there is nothing in it to strike. But strong souls cannot be placid and passive in the presence of sordidness or sin. Moses could not, Jesus could not, John could not. He sometimes went too far, as in this case when the usual hospitality of the East was refused. But rightly disciplined, this energy and fire in the young apostle will be a Godsend to the future cause of right, and Jesus knew it. Jesus always thought more about what men might become than what they were. He built on their possibility rather than their history.

As a boy, John had spent days of unflagging delight in picturesque Galilee. In addition to being a fisherman, he had been a student of nature,—a dreamer, visionary, recluse; a man of tense nerve and active temperament. All this is reflected in the haunting charm and innate strength of his writings. He was so brilliant, so talented, with such an ingratiating personal charm that Jesus, and we may well believe the entire band, loved him like a child. His very presence must have evoked a warm glow of enthusiasm which spread itself like a sunny contagion over the company. Here was a budding genius, and Jesus knew it, a "charioteer of the sun." He was young and energetic and full of promise, but full of stormy passions too. He accepted the call of Christ with boyish enthusiasm; and he never found anything in Christ to shackle his fiery free soul as the spirit-hampering tenets of the rabbis had sought to do.

III

John quickly became especially dear to Jesus. He soon knew himself to be closer to Him than any other of the Twelve. Though his name stands last in the spiritual triumvirate of Jesus' special friends—Peter, James, and John—yet he was first in the esteem of his Master. From the beginning it was his destiny to be with Jesus. From the outside world he entered, first, within the circle of the Twelve. Then he passed nearer, being admitted into the circle of the intimate Three, and finally he was the *One* "whom Jesus loved." John was one of those whom Jesus wanted near Him in every crisis hour. He was admitted into the room where Christ brought the synagogue-ruler's daughter back to life; he stood by Him on Hermon at His transfiguration (was it here that John got the insights which qualified him later to produce the visions of the Apocalypse?[1]) At the Last Supper it was John who could ask Jesus a question whom no one else could. To him at the Cross Jesus committed His mother; an act which shows His boundless trust and confidence in John; and Mary lived, presumably, in John's home the remainder of her days.

It has been supposed that John got much of his deep insight into the inner life of Jesus from Mary as they talked together about Him "in his own home." And doubtless so. It was John, who at the news of the Resurrection, was swift and agile and eager enough to outrun all others and come first to the empty tomb. And after Pentecost it was he who, with Peter, defied the authorities of Jerusalem and went on preaching Jesus in spite of all. When Jerusalem was destroyed and the infant Church scattered, John went out into the hostile world to play the part of a heroic "Son of Thunder" in planting the Church of his crucified Master. And wherever legend or history touches his life he is still faithfully doing the work his Master sent him to do.

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[1] After careful study I am convinced that "the disciple whom Jesus loved," in the Fourth Gospel, is John the Apostle, and that he was the author of the Gospel, the three epistles of John, and the Revelation. The theory that another John called "the presbyter" wrote the Gospel, or that there ever was such a person, rests on too slender evidence, in my opinion, to be convincing.

Wherever love or loyalty to Christ was involved, John was first. He was first among those who chose to ally themselves with Jesus in Galilee; first to resent the discourtesy which Jesus suffered from the rude Samaritans when passing through their village. He was Jesus' bosom companion on the Last Night in the Upper Room. He alone stood near the Cross when all others had fled, not daring to stay, and saw his Master die—one of the faithful and fearless four who stood there to the end, and the only *man* of the group, the others being the "three Marys". He was the first to recognize as their risen Lord that mysterious Figure who approached the sombre Eleven in the grey dawn of that morning after the Resurrection in Galilee. He was the first, also, to come by swift intuition to the true understanding of Jesus as the Eternal One.

IV

John had a fine and gifted nature. He was of a melancholic temperament, the temperament of silence, of brooding, and of profound meditation; the temperament of poets, philosophers, thinkers. He was the Plato of the New Testament. Though by far the youngest of Christ's disciples, yet he was the most contemplative; and his thought was at once suave, seminal, and searching. Though he had the mind of a philosopher, he was never guilty of producing "intellectual dishwater". Like Bunyan and the prophet Ezekiel, he betrays a fondness for symbolic figures: he thought in pictures—pictures which are symbols, striking, effective and beautiful. Through all his writings he breathes a rare veneration for Jesus, and his words still strike fire from reverent and vigorous souls. Has anyone more perfectly imprisoned his own personality in the words which he has set on record than Saint John? There is about them—as there ever was about the apostle himself—an abiding charm which none who reads can miss.

What a study is the face of this young disciple in "the Last Supper" as painted by Zimmermann! See the look of wonder and mysticism in that youthful face. See the fire in those eyes. Note the tenseness of his being, as Jesus announces that one of them shall betray Him. There was blended in his character a certain fierceness, a tenderness, and contemplativeness altogether unusual. Next to Paul his was the rarest soul and the richest mind of all the apostles. He was both a warm-blooded man and a philosopher; both meditative and active; at once mystic and man of practical mind. He did his greatest work as an old man—writing the Gospel, the epistles, and ministering in the Church—but he never lost the vivacity and dash of the beloved young "Son of Thunder". He brought to duty and the truth the eagerness and ardor of youth. Among the Twelve, Peter held the primacy in leadership, but John was first in love, first in zeal and first in depth of thought.

According to tradition it was John who, having last observed that the bodily things of Jesus had been set forth in the first three Gospels, felt prompted to produce a *spiritual gospel.* Hence we have the matchless Fourth Gospel. The Synoptic Gospels had given the outward history of the Master, but John would set forth His inward and eternal significance. Matthew, Mark, and Luke had depicted, aye, so interestingly, the Prophet of Nazareth, Capernaum, and Jerusalem; but John talked with rapture of the *Logos* or eternal Word made flesh. In one of the profoundest passages ever penned he sets forth Jesus as God and man: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men, . . . " dear, dear memory as he looks back now upon those days of fellowship with Christ on earth—"we *beheld* his glory". He never got done talking, in after days, about that "glory."

John was always a great worker. When Jesus called him he was busy with James mending their nets. The young man engaged in honest toil must have impressed Jesus, and doubtless it was his industry as well as his religious fervor that made Jesus invite him into His company. Anyhow these two things, thrift and vision, sustained him in one of the longest and most wonderful lives of history.

For a time after the death of Jesus John was not prominent, his name fades from the records, but at length he comes back—to stay. Peter and Paul had been killed in Rome. Jerusalem had been destroyed. The Church had been thrust out of its home to face a hostile world. John wandered far away into Asia where he strengthened the churches founded by Paul and founded some himself. In the mystic confines of the Province Asia he became more than ever a dreamer of dreams and seer of visions.

V

Saint John, though always a refined and choice spirit, as a young man had as his besetting sins, intolerance, ambition and pride.

Christ takes men and separates them from their coarse surroundings and gross companions; He elevates them to a higher plane of life. He makes men honorable and successful. But even this has its dangers. The man whom Christ has transformed is liable to become scornful, cynical, and overbearing toward base and indecorous men unless he cultivate sympathy and humility; and one cannot slip into a more fatal habit than that of regarding one's self as a superior person. The superiority complex and the self-giving, brotherly spirit of Jesus do not dwell in the same breast. This the youthful John was slow to learn.

That the Beloved Disciple was intolerant, the Record makes perfectly clear.

There came a day when John saw a man doing good: he was casting out devils in the name and by the power of Christ. But this was irregular. The man was not a *bona fide* follower of Jesus; not one of the select circle, but an outsider. It was enough that he was not of their company: "as if" says Bruce, "all inside that charmed circle—Judas for example—were good, and all outside, not excepting a Nicodemas, utterly Christless!" Anyhow John was jealous of any not of their number making use of the name of Christ. He hotly rebuked the man; told him to stop the use of his Master's name, no matter to how good a purpose. He thought the Twelve should hold a monopoly on that name. Alas, for the early rise of High Churchism!

John was a Jew, and not free from Jewish religious bigotry. It was that old exclusiveness which shouted "heathen!" at every one not an Israelite, cropping out in him now. But what right had the fellow to make use of his Master's name? Should one not a follower of Christ do Christ's work? John silenced him, and watched for the ear of Jesus to tell Him what he had done, feeling well assured of His approval. "Master," he said, "we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we rebuked him because he followed not with us."

What boundless egotism, what conceit; what dictatorial pride! The man was doing good, doing it in the name of Christ, though not a member of their sect. How like those who claim theirs as exclusively the Church of Christ! A well-known branch of the Church still says, "Out of our communion is no possibility of salvation or of goodness." So thought the young, but unripe, and over-zealous disciple of Jesus. But for this narrowness he was rebuked: "Forbid him not," said Jesus, "he that is not against us is for us." Rare Christian charity, this! but the disciples did not have it yet. Do they have it now? The spacious minded Master saw confederates where yet the sectarian John saw only foes.

But we have a more glaring example of the temper and intolerance of the Son of Thunder in an episode already mentioned.

Toward the close of His ministry Jesus and the Twelve came one day just at nightfall into a certain village of the Samaritans. They desired to stay over night. But they were Jews, and more, it was plain to the villagers that they were on their way to Jerusalem.

The Samaritans and Jews have a long-standing grudge against each other. When the weary band asked a much-needed courtesy the fanatical villagers reopened the old sore—"The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans," they reminded them, and flatly refused them lodging for the night. The Master's face was toward the Temple and Jerusalem, and Jerusalem and the Temple they hated. They had their own temple on Mount Gerezim, where they held both Jews and Samaritans should worship, since it was the ancient shrine of Jacob. So bitter and blind was their prejudice that they would not allow any Jew, who owned Jerusalem as the place where men ought to worship, not even Jesus Himself, to sleep in their town over night.

James and John were so angered at this rudeness that they came to Jesus with the wild proposal to call down fire from heaven and destroy them. It may be that something about the incident or locality brought Elijah to mind. Anyhow it popped into the mind of the quick-tempered John that Elijah had done this very thing on that very spot centuries before. If Israel's great prophet had with right burned up his enemies with fire from heaven, why should not the Messiah thus vindicate His authority and punish this bold affront to His person now? "Lord, shall we call down fire from heaven and burn them up as Elijah did?" 'Twas "the mood of the zealot with more heat than heart"; the destructive ardor of "an undisciplined boy accustomed to have his own way". Needless to say, Jesus was amazed. Very much displeased with this specimen of pious ferocity, He said, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of," and went on, "the Son of Man has not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

What a shocking proposal to come from John! He had been for years with Jesus. He had heard His discourses with the woman at the well in Samaria; had heard Him talk there of God's love for all men, and of the blessed era of love and brotherhood which was dawning. The apostle of love? not yet, but a Son of Thunder still.

John is of the temperament which accepts literally that word of Jesus, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." His career is threatened by the temptation of the short cut. He cannot wait for slow processes to work themselves out.

It is not icy selfishness, but the impulsive, eager reach after the desired thing. John is a dreamer; and great is our debt to the world's dreamers, but the "steeds of the sun" must be restrained "lest our wings melt and our crash be beyond repair."

Then, too, John was ambitious.

It was but a few days before the crucifixion, they were trekking—the disciples and Jesus—for the last time to Jerusalem. The raising of Lazarus had precipitated a crisis. Jesus was watching the gathering storm. He was thinking of death and the Cross. But little did they know what was coming. They thought the Kingdom of God was about to appear. They were dreaming of the thrones they hoped to occupy in that Kingdom. They had just come from Perea where Christ had said something about His Kingdom which they had utterly misunderstood. They had all suddenly become self-seeking place-hunters.

While they were foolishly wrangling about imaginary thrones which, in their vanity they saw themselves ascending, James and John, with the aid of their astute mother, Salome, were executing a little plot to come into the best positions in the worldly Kingdom which they thought Christ would presently set up. They came to Jesus with the bold request: "Grant that we may sit one on thy right hand and the other on thy left hand in thy kingdom."

It was an ambitious and presumptuous request. But worse than that, it was naked selfishness; it was impudent forwardness, huge headstrong vanity. Then what lack of generosity toward the others! What disrespect for their feelings!

This crass self-seeking must have distressed Jesus, but He "dealt with them as a father might deal with a child that had made a senseless request." Very delicately He dismissed it as childish ignorance, saying, "You know not what you ask."

Yet when He questioned them as to their fitness for such an honor saying: "Can ye drink my cup and be baptized with my baptism?" they said, "We can." Alas for their presumption! Had His teaching and example counted for nothing with the sons of Zebedee? Still He was not discouraged. He called the Twelve about Him, and in the gentleness of His infinite patience, taught them a lesson in true greatness: He set before them some helpless children and said, "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant. For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

It is hard to think these things of John. The world came early to think of him as the premier saint of the first Christians, the incarnation of a winsome tenderness, the most gentle and devout of the Twelve. And this is not strange. Rather, it is what you would expect; for to read his writings in the New Testament —the Gospel, the three epistles, and the Revelation— is to come irresistibly to such a conclusion. They have a flavor, a spirituality all their own.

It is John who sets forth Christianity as *love,* and love to Jesus as God; a rare fellowship in which Jesus is the bosom *Friend* of His followers. He quotes His parting words: "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends." The converse of Master and disciple is so sweet, to part from each other is nothing short of heart-breaking. And when He must and does leave them, they can think of nothing sweeter than to meet with Jesus again, either in heaven or a return of His to earth.

The going away of Jesus released the wells of love in John's mystical breast. Henceforth the love of God was his all-absorbing theme, and the strength and pungency of that love he felt to be unfathomable, immeasurable, inexpressible. He felt as one of our time expressed it:

> "Could we with ink the ocean fill,
>   Were the whole world of parchment made,
> Were every single stick a quill,
>   Were every man a scribe by trade;
> To write the love of God alone
>   Would drain the ocean dry;
> Nor could the scroll contain the whole
>   Though stretched from sky to sky."[1]

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[1] *Poems with Power to Strengthen the Soul,* James Mudge, *Ed.,* The Abington Press.

CHAPTER V

JOHN: FROM SON OF THUNDER TO APOSTLE OF LOVE (Continued)

HIS LATER LIFE

In imagination it is easy to picture Saint John as a small, pale, delicate, sensitive man, whose large dreamy eyes look upon the world through clouds of mystic fancies; gentle and retiring in manner, speaking softly and smiling seldom. Thus many have come to think of him. But whatever truth there is in this, it cannot be the whole truth.

If our best traditions are correct, he was of lithe and supple figure; of spare frame, his face full of character, while the totality of his person suggested the shock of battle. Any cause flaunting opposition to Christ, such as the Gnostic Philosophy, was provocative of turmoil; and in turmoil John was much at home. In such times he would always sally forth to conquer. To the end of his days he was swayed by a fierce energy. Being oblivious to externals, and a devotee of the inner sanctum of the soul, he was, in spite of occasional harshness, as gentle as a child.

I

We have seen in the previous chapter that Saint John was highly imaginative, full of lofty and deep ideas, a creature of ardent affections and impulses, and when young, bright and blithesome. Though age sometimes found him sombre enough, he was never impersonal or cold. The artist Zimmermann, in his picture already referred to, has caught the truth, it would seem, amazingly well. What a mystic face! What speaking eyes! young, dark, luminous, speaking and peering piercingly. One day these gleaming eyes will see visions boundless as the sea which washes the rocky shores of the isle of his exile.

We have seen, too, that the structure of John's mind was poetic and philosophic. He was weird, rhythmic and fantastic—never, never flippant—and easily misunderstood by a flippant world. Nor do we of to-day readily understand him. He was, it seems, inclined to be shy and pensive, craving little commerce with the breezy world about him; was a desert soul, a hermetic spirit.

John had abundance of both logic and faith, but logic was ever kept in sweet subservience to faith: logic is but a chilly substitute for the flame of faith. John was full of golden thoughts and emotions, and in his youth, full of tender faults as well—and some not so tender, as has been shown. He was a shrewd detector of error. Not having been always fully free from guile himself, he possessed the best defence against guile in others. Like Peter, he came of noted stock—a race of hardy fishermen—and was a worthy son of worthy sires; but he was to witness scenes and have experiences which his forebears never did.

John was a seraphic soul, a seer of spiritual power, an addict at vision. He sent messages to the struggling churches of Asia, which he had established, and which he thought of as fortresses and strongholds in the holy war, setting forth Christ as the glorified Commander-in-Chief of the Christian armies. He is "King of the ages", and John describes Him in a way that cannot fail of being impressive. The radiant face, the flaming eyes, the snow-white hair, the spotlessly white robe, the glowing feet, and the hand that could grasp the stars—all these bespeak the majesty of the personality of the Divine Leader as John the seer conceived Him.

That Saint John had a fertile and fruitful imagination, none who has studied the man through his writings can doubt; but he was practical withal. He was in many ways a whimsical character. He contrived to live continually in a sort of fever-heat excitement, in which state triumphs of the spirit are easily achieved. His writings (I refer to the Apocalypse now), are full of suggestions of the strange, sometimes weird, but never the grotesque. He was never effusive. His brain was clear and hot and active. He was an imperial spirit. Always vibrant with vivacity, vehemence and sometimes violence, he would speak bitingly; sometimes he blazed and flared, but judging from his recorded words, he was usually given to the sweetest tones.

Under the kindly touch of Christ the Mount Everest prejudices of this man dwindled into molehills, if they did not entirely vanish. John became the impersonation of his Lord, his Master's intrepid confidant. He was the incarnation of love: this quality he had in a perfection only approximated by his brethren.

II

The one word, then, which sums up all John's *later* life and teaching is the word *love*. For him love is the one attribute of God. *"God is love."* And love is the one pre-eminent characteristic of the Christian brother, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God." The unmistakable sign that a man loves God is that he loves his fellowmen, "He that loves God loves his brother also." "If we love one another, God dwells in us." "He who dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him." Then obviously, to hate a brother is to hate God, "If a man say, I love God, and hate his brother, he is a liar."

This is plain talk for the apostle of love, but genuine, undistorted love is not sentimental or mushy. It cannot treat sin in a light or easy fashion. It forbids that rose-water view of sin, a view all too prevalent in modern times. It sees sin, like spilled ink, blackening all it touches; sees it tragic in its effects on men; sees it tragic in its cost to God; sees it tragic in every way. He who loves most best understands sin, and he who best understands sin deplores it most.

It is not strange that John is the only one who remembered and records Jesus' saying, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples—if ye love one another." Prophets and poets had said God was *power;* John thought so, too, when he began to follow Jesus, but he never forgot his Master's charming revelation of God as *love.* He took it in and went out to make love the one and only and all-embracing article of his Christian creed. He never wearied of urging the followers of Christ to *love.*

III

But this is a portrait of John in his riper years when he was indeed a finished saint. This is not he of the early gospels, but what he *became.*

John outlived all the other apostles by most a half century. He saw all the Church's first great lights pass behind the veil—James, Peter, James the Lord's brother, and even the dauntless Paul—all were dead by 65 A. D. He saw the first generation of Christians go and another come, and with it strange heresies and hostilities. Still he tarried. He was banished by Domitian, emperor of the Romans, to Patmos in the Aegean Sea where he lived to see and pen for future ages the immortal visions of the Book of Revelation. He lived to see the churches which he and others had planted in Asia grow careless and cold, and to censure them for their staid, insipid lukewarmness. He seems to have died just as the first Christian century was expiring, ripe in Christian character and experience, ripe in greatness and goodness, ripe in age and toil-crowned years.

"We have fallen in love," says George Clarke Peck, "with his *latest* likeness and hurried past the earlier portraits of him, as if his life were *all* admirable. On the contrary, John's afternoon beautifully belied the threat of its morning. He became more than he promised. As a recruit in the army of Jesus he was headstrong, pettish, vain. In short, a typical mother-spoiled boy." Yes; but how changed he is! We do not know when or how the change came to John. Suddenly or gradually, we do not know. But we see him *changed*. He had stumbled on through fire and murk to the mastery of his soul. The John of the riper years is a *new* John.

In many ways the saintly career of Fletcher of Madeley was like the last days of Saint John. A Swiss by birth, he came to England in the early days of the Methodist movement and was soundly converted to Christ. Like the apostle, he became a passionate lover of Jesus and put his gifted life unreservedly at His service. He gladly bore the stigma which being a Methodist in those days brought. For years he served as an obscure but capable and faithful vicar of Christ in an ungrateful and often hostile atmosphere. But in 1785, sick and worn with parish cares, he went to preach his last sermon. His friends entreated him not to preach, but he felt he must try. During the prayer he almost fainted. His wife pushed through the crowd and pressed him to give it up. But gently declining her wish, he persisted. The windows were opened to give him fresh air. He gave out his text: "How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God." But the end soon came. The last words he was heard to murmur were those ponderous words of Saint John: "God is love; God is love."

It is said that the last words of Saint John were these: "Little children, love one another." The aged apostle, it seems, spent his last years in Ephesus, where his presence had the effect of investing the place with a lingering glamour of the memorable days of Jesus. When he was no longer able to preach at large, and too feeble to preach in the church where he worshipped, his followers would carry him every Sunday into the church that his presence might be a blessing to all. At the close of the service the minister would ask him to say a few words. The old man would slowly rise, or be lifted up, stretch out his hands in benediction, and lovingly say, "Little children, love one another." Eastwood in his *"Saint John the Aged"* has pictured this scene as follows:

"What say you, friends?
That this is Ephesus, and Christ has gone
Back to His Kingdom? Ay, 'tis so, 'tis so:
I know it all: and yet, just now I seemed
To stand once more upon my native hills,
And touch my Master. . . .
Up! Bear me to my church once more,
There let me tell them of a Saviour's love:
For by the sweetness of my Master's voice
I think He must be very near.

So, raise up my head:
How dark it is! I cannot seem to see
The faces of my flock. Is that the sea
That murmurs so, or is it weeping? Hush!
My little children! God so loved the world
He gave His Son: so love ye one another,
Love God and men. Amen."[1]

Week by week this was his message to the Christians at Ephesus. When asked why he always said the same thing, he replied: "Because there is nothing more to be said. Love is the whole of Christian duty. If we love one another, that is everything. Love, and all men shall know that ye are Christ's disciples."

And this is he who was the hot-tempered, fire-breathing youth of other days. Jesus has remade him. He is a lovable old man now. His fiery vehemence is quite tamed. Tamed and remade, yet possessing those same thunder-and-lightning qualities to the end. Against the faith-destroying doctrines which threatened the life of the infant Church and belittled his great Master, he hurled volts of verbal lightning: "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?" The Gnostic unbelievers found in him a virile foe and a valiant defender of Christ.

IV

The Asian Christians by a wave of good fortune had fallen heirs to great material emoluments. But with the coming of these things there crept into the churches a fatal coldness. They were saying in effect, "We are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." But the prophet-apostle, speaking for his glorified Master now, told them they were "wretched, and miserable and poor, and blind and naked." He characterized them as "lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold," fit only to be spewed out of the mouth of God.

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[1] *Bible Lands To-day,* W. T. Ellis, D. Appleton & Co.

The aged saint could not bear to see the Church become "cool and respectable", and he knew what we too know so well, that a passionless Church is a dead Church. A Church without zeal is a Church without life. In this, however, John was like his Lord. Christians must have the salt of enthusiasm. All other faults or deficiencies Christ could tolerate, but He could have neither part nor lot with men destitute of enthusiasm. He held it a thing almost inexcusable in one who proposed to become His disciple that he asked leave first to bid farewell to his relations. When another asked permission to bury his father, he was advised to let the dead bury the dead (that is, those whose hearts were not animated by any strong passion or impulse). And once when it seemed all men might join the number of Christ's followers, lest He should be surrounded with half-hearted, superficial adherents, He turned suddenly upon the crowd and declared He could receive no man who did not *hate* his father and mother, all he had, and his life beside.

Lukewarmness is the most hopeless temperature for a soul or a church. It is not enough to be merely "interested" in what the Church teaches; not enough to quietly approve of the tenets of religion; not enough to stand with your hat off to Jesus Christ, never flinging yourself at His feet, inviting the King of Love to be Lord of your life. It has been said that women love a stormy lover. So does God. He loves a stormy Peter or a flaming John better than these cool, decorous disciples who never ardently avow their loyalty or break into a flame of devotion.

Fervent enthusiasm has ever been an indispensable instrument in spreading the Kingdom of Heaven. Emerson, it is said, left the ministry because his attitude toward Christian work was "something like a yawn." The epigrams and essays of Emerson are brilliant and interesting, but cold; they charm the intellect but do not warm the heart or stir the soul. Fanaticism in religion is damaging; but a frenzy of fanaticism is preferable to cold-headedness. The man who has no temper has no enthusiasm; and he who never gets excited, never gets anywhere. Enthusiasm awakens latent powers; it makes men magnetic and successful. Before enthusiasm the devils of sloth and difficulty fly. John was ever "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

V

One must admire the unflagging energy which caused this apostle to sweep with the gospel into distant places, stamping with the sign of the Cross all the great centers of the Province Asia. It was doubtless his zeal as well as his tenderness and insight which so endeared him to Jesus at the first. "The rare combination of contemplativeness and passion, of strength and sweetness, in the same soul—the perfect faith which inspired his devotion, and the perfect love which precluded fear—these were the gifts and graces which rendered him worthy" of so singular a place in the Kingdom of Christ. This aggressive fisherman of Galilee made the Church seem so formidable in the Roman empire that the emperor took to killing Christians, and John was sent to rocky Patmos where his only outlet for a time was the outlet toward the sky, so a part of his ripe life was spent in rapt and lone converse with heaven.

With ecstasy of spirit and great delight of soul he now reports to the *whole world* that God is love. Now recall with what delight this man, once nationalistic and narrow, would have destroyed Samaritans who were churlish to Jesus! In the words of another, "How startling to think of this same John a year or two after the date of that savage suggestion, going down from Jerusalem and preaching the gospel of Jesus the crucified in 'many of the villages of the Samaritans,' possibly in this very village which he desired to see destroyed."

What has come over this once vindictive man? He has been changed from savagery to sympathy, from egotism to impersonality, from self to self-surrender—and Christ has done it. His pugnacity and intolerance are gone. At first the hot-tempered Son of Thunder, he has become the world's outstanding apostle of love.

While with Jesus, John was constantly on the lookout for self-pre-eminence, but now he seeks nothing so much as the pre-eminence of Jesus. In his gospel the only title he gives himself is, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." So far from this being "immodesty" on John's part—as some have said—it is, I think, rare modesty. He does not mark Jesus as showing favoritism to him, but simply hints at the close and beautiful friendship which existed between them. Yes; modesty is the word, not immodesty. Once he sought assiduously the place of towering prominence, but now he craves to efface himself from the royal portrait he is painting of his Master; at most he puts himself in only as a mere detail in the picture—"that disciple whom Jesus loved". We search in vain for his name in his gospel. He was now the solemn-eyed sage-apostle and benevolence personified. There was about him a "tender melancholy of exalted seriousness".

If there were need for further evidence of the unabated fidelity and devotion of John to his Master, or of his complete transformation by Him, we would have it in this story which Clement of Alexander relates.

Somewhere in his journeys in Asia the apostle made a convert of a young man of promise who had been one of a band of robbers. He left him to be educated by Christians in a city which he did not re-visit for years. For a time the young man made progress in the Christian life. But after a while he fell away. He took to evil courses and once more joined the brigands. Finally the aged apostle returned. The first thing he did was to ask about the young man he had placed in their care. He was told by the elders that he had departed from them, and was actually at that moment the chief of a band of robbers in the near-by mountains. The wrath of the aged apostle was hot against these Christians. He rebuked them as careless and impotent. But he was not to be defeated. Unaided and alone the old man set out for the mountains in search of the robbers' camp. He was captured, as he expected to be, by spies from the camp and demanded to be taken before their leader. He was soon in the presence of the dreaded marauder chief. He threw his arms around him, wept over him, prayed for him, pleaded with him until he won him back to Christ, and restored him to the Christian fold.

John took his Master literally. He never forgot His charming but searching words about the Good Shepherd and the stray sheep. He never failed to leave the ninety and nine who were no longer in need of repentance and seek out and bring back to safety within the Christian fold the lost and wandering one.

"O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O Light that followest all my way,
  I yield my flickering torch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
  May brighter, fairer be."

Now old and given, doubtless, to pacific visions of his approaching demise, there flowed over the soul of the old apostle the anodyne of forgetfulness and peace. There might be warrings without—and there were—, but inwardly his soul had attained a state of idyllic happiness.

But in a sense Saint John refused to grow old. The years had little to do with him. Though he was a hundred years old, he was as young in spirit as ever; as dapper as when fishing in famed little Lake Tiberius, or trudging with his Master through fields and lanes and village streets of Galilee. He constantly renewed his youth by feeding upon the mystery and majesty of his erstwhile Lord. Harry Webb Farrington's lines concerning another would have been true of him —

"Still firm of step, keen eyed and lithe of limb,
Although grey Time had overtaken him."

He was a born fighter, his life being one long battlefield. His militant energy was enormous; he was ever borne on by an indefatigable zeal; and to the struggling Church he was to the end a kind of "lambent flame of inspiration". Romantic in his youth he remained romantic to the end of his long, almost ideal life. He still persisted in clothing with mystery the everyday objects of life. While no dweller in crystaline palaces, yet he was able in vision to fashion impressive pictures of the invisible edifices of God toward which he now swiftly journeyed.

Like all the first apostles, Saint John literally died in the harness. And when he passed he left a nameless void, having weathered the battle and the gale for a century. His life had been fascinating in its many-sidedness, its lasting spiritual achievements, and even his death was a benediction.

CHAPTER VI

THOMAS: THE CAUTIOUS BELIEVER

"Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?"—John 14:5.

Says Glenn Frank: "Two fateful spirits battle for control of our lives—the spirit of courage and the spirit of caution. Courage makes us creative. Caution makes us compromising. Courage makes us receptive to new ideas. Caution makes us resentful of new ideas. Caution makes us diplomatic. Courage is commonly associated with youth. Caution is commonly associated with age. But at what time in a man's life does courage wane and caution wax?"

Was it because Thomas had reached middle-life with its fixedness and disillusions that he found it no simple matter to believe readily in Jesus? And was it because John was young, impressionable, as yet unformed and unfixed, that he found it easy to believe? In any case, when we are introduced to Thomas, we find him to be of a slow, hesitating habit of mind; he is taciturn. He has the habit of suspicion, the regulative habit of caution.

But for all this Thomas was a man of virile will; a man strong of purpose and firm of heart. Unlike Peter, he had not a quick or agile mind. Unlike John, he was not imaginative, mystical, or given to passion. He was never eruptive; was as unemotional as he was steadfast. He was a reserved man, almost secretive, slow of mind, absorbed usually in his own inner life, introspective, fearful, and inclined to self-depreciation.

He was judicious, rather cold, calculating, cautious. Everything not clear as the light of day had to be dissected, pondered, weighed in his calculating brain before he could be convinced of its claim or lend it his credence or support. He was never quite sure of himself. To any pre-eminent or uncommon good he came haltingly lest it prove "too good to be true". Incredulity or an unwarranted optimism were not faults of Thomas.

Thomas was made of sterling stuff, faithful, incorruptible, modest, standardized, and conservative to the point where personal individuality makes a huge impression like some Great Stone Face.

Peter or the imaginative John might be nervous on occasion, but Thomas never forsook his calm, amid his serene composure, he was ever intense: in him skepticism warred with the wish to believe and left him torn and anxious. He was a bit stubborn, but not unreasonable; not to be bamboozled, slow, but in the end muddling his way through to the truth. His personality was broad, yet not lacking in edge and point; he was gentle, yet firmly assertive. He was a thinker who could grasp truth in its fundamental elements; a quite regal soul, an almost fanatical follower of the most regal Personage known to history.

The account preserved for us of Thomas is in striking contrast to that we have of Peter, for instance. We find few personal incidents chronicled about Thomas. But from the meagre account we have of him, we know him to have been a man of kindly bearing, yet of commanding personality, though excessively retiring and diffident; elusive and not easy to approach.

Thomas was a man sedate in his affections, not apt it seems, at forming private friendships, but once he had taken an attachment, he was not easily swayed from it. Possibly he had been at first a self-contained and self-centered man, inclined to view the world's "passing show" with as complete detachment as if it had been an ant-hill. However this may be, it is clear that he was a phlegmatic person, somewhat lacking in the verve and quickness of adaptability which in every situation everywhere and everywhen distinguished Peter. He was of a doubting disposition but was never morose.

We know next to nothing about this disciple of the Lord called Thomas except what the Gospel of John tells us. In the other three gospels he is simply mentioned as being one of the famous Twelve. But from John we learn a good deal about Thomas, as to the kind of character he was. Saint John was the keenest soul-analyzer, the one psychologist, among the evangelists. From the picture he gives us of Thomas, he is a quiet, slow-moving, extremely cautious, and very reflective man, though not of intellectual depth. He is a man of moods, very earnest, but prosaic and commonplace in thought and feeling. As compared with others of the apostles, say Peter or John, he would seem, at first, to be a rather mediocre man. Unlike Peter, he seldom speaks, and never until he has brooded over a matter or is deeply moved. He was the modest Melanchthon of these first Christian reformers. He thinks much but talks little.

And yet on a few important occasions Thomas does speak out; and inasmuch as any man's real character is known by the words he utters, since one's speech cannot fail to reveal one's true self, it is here that we get an authentic look-in upon the life of this diffident apostle. Thomas is a man of few words, but how we wait for and weigh the few words of the silent man, especially if he be at the same time a thoughtful man! Whyte says, "Thomas was too great a melancholian to speak much, and when he did speak it was always out of the depths of his hypochondriacal heart." Our text forms a part of the second utterance made by Thomas in the gospels. They are gathered in the Upper Room, Jesus and the Twelve; Jesus speaks of going from them to the Father's House, then adds, "And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." But Thomas is all agnostic now. He professes to know nothing of what Jesus is talking about. "Lord, we know not wither thou goest; and how can we know the way?"

A noted preacher of our day has called Thomas "a man without wings". He was assuredly without the wings of faith by which to mount above the foggy and problematical experiences of this world. He seldom, if ever, soared. George Matheson has with keen insight called him "the man of cypress", and says, "He looked at the world from under his cypress-tree, and he pronounced it an impossible world." All Christian history has dubbed this apostle "the doubter". And it cannot be denied, even if it were desirable, that he was a constitutional, if not a chronic, doubter. As his name indicates, he was double-minded. He was twin-tempered, dubious. But he was more than a doubter. He was an honest believer also, though a most hesitant and cautious one.

I

Let us look first at the *courage* of Thomas.

Listen to those words of his uttered on the occasion of the death of Lazarus of Bethany: they are his first recorded words. It is the first time Thomas has spoken. It is toward the close of the last year of our Lord's ministry. The high claims He has been making for Himself and the stringent demands He has been making of those who would enter His company have created a commotion among the Jews of the South. In Judea, and especially at Jerusalem, He has become *persona non grata.* What has been a slowly-gathering resentment, hitherto held in check by the mesmeric personality of Jesus or fear of the people, is now at the point of breaking into open hostility.

In order to evade their fury Jesus repairs to the more secluded places to the North. Their indefatigable opposition has driven Him once more out of Judea. He is now preaching east of the Jordan up in Perea. While in this desert spot word reaches Him that Lazarus, his personal friend, has died. He resolves to go back into the hostile territory about Jerusalem. He does not press His disciples to accompany him back into the danger zone, but simply makes known His intention and leaves them to choose or refuse to go with Him as they will; but for His part, He is determined. He says, *"I go."* The fearful disciples were taken aback by such a proposal, for He had just left Jerusalem with the Jews holding stones ready to fling at Him. In complete astonishment they said, "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?" They reasoned and remonstrated with Him, they vigorously warned Him not to return to Jerusalem, feeling sure that if He did He would be killed. But they saw that He was resolved to go, and no longer tried to dissuade Him.

As yet Thomas has not spoken a word, but he has been thinking a-plenty. Then through the silence this silent man speaks out, and for the first time becomes the spokesman and leader of the company: "Let us also go," says Thomas, "that we may die with him!" True to his questioning nature he anticipates the worst. To him such a venture can mean but one thing: death for his Master and death for them, His followers. This man of melancholy, this cypress-minded man, is prone to take the sombre view of things. His innate prudence and fear and caution conspire in him to give him a too vivid imagination now. He can see the enemies of Christ standing yonder with stones in their hands. He can see the flying missiles and witness aforetime the cruel death which will surely be theirs if they return to Jerusalem. But he loves his Master with a great and all-compelling love, and, though in utter hopelessness, yet with a beautiful devotion, when he sees that He is resolute in His purpose to return, says to the rest of them, "Let us also go, that we may die with him. It means death I know, but let us go and die."

Thomas would rather be dead with Jesus than alive without Him. Death with his Master was better than life without Him. It had been next to impossible for him to conceive of Christ dying at all. Christ and death were to him irreconcilable; he could not think of them together, and when he was forced to admit that the Messiah would be killed, he believed it was the end of everything worth living for. For him the worth, to say nothing of the witchery of life, was gone. Thomas had no hope of a resurrection. So far as he is now concerned the death of Jesus is the death of His Kingdom. Beyond the grave he sees no Christ and no Kingdom. He is skeptical, hopeless. "Let us die with Him!"

Was it the blind dispair of the suicide who wishes to die with his love, since he can see nothing for the time being worth living for? No; that is childish, selfish, heartless. Rather it was this: the cherished cause for which he had given all to win, to which he had dedicated his life, seemed crashing. Obviously his Master was headed for inevitable ruin: he would share that ruin. His interests, his hopes, and the interests and hopes of his Master are bound up together; they are one and inseparable. If his Master die, then he will die too. Neither in life nor death will he be parted from his Lord. They are inseparable companions—Thomas and Christ.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his Friend." Thomas had accepted the exacting saying of Christ as a part of his creed; he would practice it now. If he is not now possessed of faith, who will say that he is not possessed of a deathless *love?* The difference between Thomas's willingness to suffer martyrdom for Christ and the martyrs of the early Church, say, James, Paul and the whole valiant company of martyrs, was, as Matheson has pointed out, a difference in time and outlook. Thomas, looking at Jesus *before* the Resurrection, saw only His spiritual beauty; they having the advantage of the *afterview,* knew Him to be physically powerful as well as spiritual, magnetic, and eternal. The martyrs were willing to die *for* Jesus; Thomas to die *with* Him. Despair; but what heroic despair! What desperate loyalty! What unselfish love! Thomas is the Moses of the New Testament, preferring to be blotted out rather than see God's people and God's cause go down in grim defeat.

Unlike Peter, Thomas was not capable of conspicuous leadership, but he was capable of unshrinking devotion to his Lord. Though by nature a man of gloom and of a cool, calm spirit, he was immovable as the rock in the face of whatever dangers, once his duty was clear. It is said that the gold-crested wren is one of the tiniest of birds. It weighs only the fifth part of an ounce, and yet on its frail pinions it braves the hurricane and crosses the Northern seas. Just so, God often makes the largest use of the most timid and trembling souls if only they be possessed of fidelity. If Thomas cannot live conspicuously for his Lord, he can heroically die with Him; and the most heartening thing in the world is a life which is faithful, it may be in small matters, but faithful unto death. If he has lived tamely, he will now live dangerously, and perish, if need be, gloriously. Like the high-minded Ruth of old, who refused to be parted from Naomi and Naomi's God, Thomas would not be separated from his Master—in life or death.

"If Jesus Christ is a man,
And only a man, I say
That of all mankind I will cleave to Him,
And to Him I will cleave alway.
If Jesus Christ is a God,
And the only God, I swear
I will follow Him through heaven and hell
The earth, the sea, and the air."[1]

II

In the next place, let us consider Thomas's *doubts.* For all the courage of the man, it is but fair to say, as said before, that he was a huge doubter. Doubt was his constitutional malady, the most characteristic thing, perhaps, about the man. He saw always the dark side of things. He took naturally the gloomy view. There in the Upper Room when Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know," Thomas broke in "Lord, we know not wither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" These words of the Lord only filled Thomas with confusion, and troubled his soul. Any suggestion of his Master's departure from them makes him deathly sad. "You are going away? Oh, whither, whither? I know not; who can tell? The future is dark. The Father's house you spoke of, what can it be? Where can it be? Is there really such a place at all? You go away . . . Your Father's house. . . . What can you mean? Oh, speak plainly."

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[1] *Poems,* Richard Watson Gilder, Houghton, Mifflin Co.

Thomas must see through things before he can believe. Dean Brown well says of him, "He had never learned to sing, 'I do not ask to see the distant scene, one step enough for me. Lead thou me on.'" He must see the bottom of everything before he ventures. He wants to know where he is going before he sets out. He wishes to view the terminus before he makes a beginning; to glimpse the haven before he embarks. But, as Napoleon said, "He will not go far who knows from the first whither he is going." To know all is to believe nothing. Thomas was little inclined to subordinate the visible to the invisible. He professed to have very little faith. He preferred to walk by sight, which is a bit more natural, and much easier for us all.

So much of the time what Jesus said was Greek to Thomas. His mind was sluggish, he was slow to make out what He meant. He knew not the way Jesus was to take, and he was certain that he did not know the way he himself was to take when Jesus was gone. Dark and threatening clouds, "clouds ready to spit their venom," darkened the sky. Then the Cross —Calvary—Jesus is killed! All is blackness to "the doubter" now. He sinks into misanthropy and despair, from which, try as he may, he cannot extricate himself. In the sadness of his soul he feeds on gloom. He is a prey to increasing dejection and dumb rancor. A man unaccustomed to getting flustered, seldom brusque, is both brusque and flustered now. Till now he has been both calculator and dreamer, but his dreams, like bubbles, have bursted; he no longer dreams; he is just a cold calculator now.

At the entombment of Jesus, Thomas fell into an insurmountable torpor; faith was crushed, will-power was dying. In vain did he try to persuade himself that Christ was not gone forever. But his feeble soul was crushed beneath what seemed a ponderous reality. Inclined to be skeptic anyhow, Thomas went about stung with grief. One fancies him wandering lugubriously among the naked hills and ghostly trees, pale of face, wasted and tragic. Sick of heart, and not untouched by envy of the dead Jesus, he saw everything through a mist of melancholy. With Jesus, his hopes had been crucified; with Him they had been buried. The One who lay in that sealed tomb was to him more than earthly all. Doubt bit into his heart like a flame.

In a fit of misanthropy and preoccupied solely with the crisis into which the death of Jesus had thrown him, he became a prey to a deep and settled melancholy. His was a tender and delicate soul and his suffering was terrible. It is not surprising that such a calamity snapped the last thread on which the hope of Thomas hung.

When his companions after the resurrection of Christ came together in the Upper Room to comfort one another, so hopeless was Thomas about the whole tragic affair, that he did not even bother to assemble with them; and when they affirmed to him, "We have seen the Lord", he frankly said, "I do not believe it." He was not to be taken in by ghost stories. As we say in America, he was from Missouri, and had to be shown. He requires not only positive proof, but tangible, one might say "handleable" evidence, before he can accept so staggering a thing as the resurrection of his Master. He will not credit even the testimony of his friends. He is almost cynical; he speaks curtly; "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and thrust my hands into his side, I *will not* believe." And yet it is evident that Thomas has "The will to believe" but what he does not have is the ability to do so. He is a materialist fitfully struggling with a spiritual ideal. He demands to *see* and *touch* the material marks of Calvary on the body of Jesus. To him his brethren's assertion that Christ is alive is absurd; and yet how gladly he would believe if he could, but he cannot. A willing mind may be nearly everything in belief, but not quite. Yes, Thomas is willing to believe, but is simply unable to. Nothing could possibly cause him greater joy, nothing could bring him more solid delight or peace of mind than to know that Christ is alive, indeed. But such a thing is altogether too good to be true. He must have the facts. So he persists doggedly, "Except I shall *see,* I will not *believe.*"

This is not the unbelief of carping skepticism or of stupid shallowness, but the unbelief of love blind with sorrow. There is pathetic soul-hunger and profound reverence in this man's doubt.

> "Except by all the wounds that brake,
> His heart, and marred His brow
> Most grievously for sorrow's sake,
> How shall I know Him now?"

Doubt arises when the converse of one's cherished belief appears to have truth in it. Thomas had believed his Master to be the Ancient of Days, the Divine Deliverer of the prophets, the Consolation of Israel. But the death of Jesus had put to death in the soul of the matter-of-fact apostle this dear hope. He sat sullen and resolute in doubt, living, meanwhile, the somber sentiment of a doubter of a later day—

> "Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
> When hot for certainties in this life."

"Doubt cramps energy. Belief is power," wrote F. W. Robertson truly; for just now Thomas is shorn of all power; his faith is muzzled, his energy cramped, his spirit crushed, paralyzed. Certainty must precede credence with Thomas in this case. Unlike Saint Augustine who said, "I do not seek to know in order that I may believe, but to believe in order that I may know," he will have it conversely—knowledge before belief. If Thomas could have prayed the prayer of the frenzied father who sought the help of Jesus for his afflicted child. "Lord, I believe—help thou mine unbelief," it would have been different with him; new light would have dawned; but he hugged his doubt. We may fancy him during these terrible days treading the lonely path of his sickening gloom. Much of the time he walks to and fro in the hills and silent glens, arms locked behind him, thinking, thinking, full of pensive anxiety.

What a pity Thomas did not meet with the Ten on that first of Christian Sabbaths! He was one of that "League of Pity", and should have been present at their meeting; but he cut himself off from his friends, and from the reassurance and help they could have given him. Forsaking the place of worship, he went off to nurse his trouble in solitude, and so missed the early vision of his Lord.

In missing church that morning "the doubter" missed a wonderful sight, for to that assembly of sorrowing worshippers came their risen Master whom Thomas missed seeing, for he "was not with them when Jesus came."

Here is a lesson for the careless Christian of our day. He who shuts himself off from the fellowship of those who name the name of Christ will find his spiritual health soon and sadly diminishing. The fellowship of kindred souls and their common worship of God is the best means to normal, happy, and successful living. By contact of soul with soul we are renewed, heartened, altered, and in worship we are simply remade. Worship is the "heart of religion" and is the one exercise most fundamental to human life and happiness.

Thomas has been seen by Dr. Clovis Chappell as a type of the absentee church member. He says, "It is a sad day ever for any congregation when its own membership begin to absent themselves from its services. It is a sad day for any congregation when those who compose it can be counted on to be there at the social function, there at the place of business, but cannot be counted on when the interests of the Kingdom are at stake and when the Son of God goes forth to war. Believe me no community ever loses respect for its congregation till that congregation loses respect for itself."[1]

Thomas not with them when Jesus came? Of all the disciples Thomas was the one who should have been there. He should have been the last one to stay away from that Upper Room church service that day. He was the saddest and bitterest man of them all; *but he was not there.* Yes, "What an unfortunate time to be away! Of course, he would have gone if he had had any idea what a wonderful service it was going to be, if he had even dreamed that Jesus was going to be there of course he would not have missed it; but he expected the meeting to be a very dull affair. He felt confident that whoever else was there that there would be no Christ. He expected that Peter and James and John would meet there and talk over a glorious past that had gone forever;"[2] but all such reflection only sunk "the doubter" deeper into despair. He resolved that he would not go to the meeting that day, and he did not.

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[1] *Sermons on Biblical Characters,* pages 10-11, Richard R. Smith, Inc., *Publishers,* New York. Used by permission.

[2] *Opt. Cit.,* page 11.

Now indifference or lack of appreciation or other "interests" keep most people away from the place of worship, but it was not indifference that kept Thomas away; nor did he stay away because he had found something elsewhere to take the place of Christ, for he was *lost* without Him. He was not there, as I have said, because he had lost hope. Christ he firmly believed was dead; His Cause had sunk, the glad game was over. Truth and beauty and every good had once more gone down before all-powerful wrong. He had ever found it hard to believe anyhow; he found it impossible now. With utter loneliness of soul this suffering man nursed in the silent gloom only the golden memories of a Christ who had died.

But oh, what he missed by staying away that day, since to the somber company in that Upper Room Jesus came! "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." *Glad!* Yes; but not Thomas; he was not there; it did not make him glad, but sadder and more skeptical still. And Thomas missed by this brooding neglect what he so sorely needed: he missed the heartening assurance of the Saviour's *living* presence; missed His blessing and benediction when He breathed on them saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." For nearly a fortnight Thomas lived in hell, and made for himself and others no little misery. Everyone in the stricken Church knew that he had gone skeptical. His death-dealing doubt spread from heart to heart among the desperate Christians. They, too, tasted the brackish fogs of his doubt and felt the chill of his loneliness.

III

But enough of this man's doubt! Let us come to a third thing in him—his *faith;* for it can at least be said to Thomas's credit that, though he doubted hugely, he was not proud of his doubts. He no more thought of boasting of them than a cripple thinks of lauding the loss of a leg or an arm as an achievement. But though full of doubt, Thomas was hungry for faith. Coleridge has said, "Never be afraid of doubt, if only you have the disposition to believe." Thomas had the disposition to believe.

"What think ye of Christ, then, when all's said and done?
Like you this Christianity or not?
It may be false, but do you wish it true?
Has it your vote to be so if it can?"

It had Thomas's vote.

Accordingly on the next Lord's Day when the disciples came together again Thomas, willing to be convinced, met with them. Thomas came seeking Christ and Christ came seeking Thomas. Christ always meets those who wish to meet Him. The Record is: "After eight days again the disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you." The Master knowing the plight of Thomas turned to him and tenderly said, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." Thomas looked into the face of Christ, and though he saw there the glory of the Eternal, he knew Him to be his erstwhile Master.

"Love came, and said, 'Reach hither, Grief,
Thy hand into My side:
Oh, slow of heart to win belief,
Seeing that for grief I died.

"Lo, all the griefs of which I died
Rise with me from the dead!
Then Grief drew near, and touched the side
And touched the wounds that bled.

"And cried, 'My God, O blessed sign,
O Body raised, made whole,
Now do I know that thou art mine,
Upholder of my soul!' "

The most unyielding skeptic suddenly became the most convinced believer. Something let loose in the soul of "the doubter," and from his lips there came a confession of the Divinity of Christ which has never been surpassed by any. In a burst of illumined conviction he exclaimed in words beautiful and unforgetable: *"My* Lord and *my* God!" How grandly personal it all is now! His same beloved Master is alive again; but now He is more than his Master; He is his *God.* "The doubter" was the first to rise to so splendid an affirmation of faith. Peter in a moment of high inspiration one day acclaimed Him the Messiah or the Son of God, but Thomas said the extreme thing. "My Lord and my God!" His Master had proven Himself the Vanquisher of death. Thomas knew that over death none but God is Lord; for him, therefore, Jesus henceforth is God.

From doubter to bold confessor, from dubiousness to a glad strong faith comes Thomas. Faith, not doubt, has now the mastery of him. He who has never doubted has never half believed; yea, more, he who has never doubted has never truly thought. Thomas has done both. It has been said that doubt is the vestibule of faith. And so it seems of Thomas. Like Tennyson's friend,

"He fought his doubts and gathered strength,
He would not make his judgment blind,
He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them: thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own;
And power was with him in the night
Which makes the darkness and the light
And dwells not in the light alone.

Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out;
There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds." [1]

If Thomas were with us to-day he would smile at the so-called Vision Theory of the Resurrection. It was a real Lord that he saw die; and it took a real, living Christ of flesh and blood to convince him of the truth of the Resurrection. Renan, the Frenchman, once said, "We owe the resurrection story to Mary Magdalene," meaning by that that Mary saw the risen Christ in vision only, but succeeded in convincing others that He had actually risen. But it was no hallucination that struck certainty into the skeptical mind of the doubting apostle and drew from him the glorious confession, "My Lord and my God!" It was not reliance upon a cherished doctrine or a creed or an article of a creed which filled Thomas with glad assurance that morning; it was the indisputable intercourse with a living Person.

"Not what, but *whom,* I do believe,
That in my darkest hour of need
Hath comfort that no mortal creed
To mortal man may give:
Not what, but *whom!*
For Christ is more than all the creeds,

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[1] *In Memoriam, Poems,* Houghton, Mifflin Co.

And His full life of gentle deeds
Shall all the creeds outlive.
Not what I do believe, but *whom!*
Who walks beside me in the gloom?
Who shares the burden wearisome?
Who all the dim way doth illume,
And bid me look beyond the tomb
The larger life to live?
Not what I do believe,
But *whom!*
Not what,
But *whom!*"[1]

It is but natural to expect that such a profound experience as Thomas had would make of him a forceful apostle and preacher of Christ's gospel; and this seems to have been what happened. It is true that the New Testament is strangely silent concerning what Thomas did to spread the "good news" abroad, but tradition firmly asserts that it was he who carried the gospel to India. Eusebius, the first great historian of the early Church, says that "by lot India fell to Thomas called the Twin", but he says that Thomas did not want to go, saying, "How can I, being a Hebrew man, go among the Indians to preach the truth?"

If these be the actual words of Thomas, they are a little disappointing, and yet they are certainly in keeping with what we know of the hesitating nature of the man. On the whole there is good ground for the belief that Thomas preached in India, and that he was martyred there on the Tamil coast in the year 51. It is not at all improbable that when Paul was evangelizing Athens, Corinth, and Rome and when John was preaching to the Seven Churches in the Province Asia, that Thomas was preaching in India. Anyhow, in the Middle of the First Century there arose in India a Christian Church who called themselves "St. Thomas Christians". The history of this early Indian Church is said to be full of St. Thomas. Their hymns are full of him; and they, to this day, claim him as their founder, though as a body they were early absorbed by the Nestorian Church of the East.

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[1] *Poems,* John Oxenham. Doubleday, Doran & Co., New York, *Publishers.* Used by permission.

If Thomas was in India, we know what he was doing there—making known the gospel of Him whom in the Upper Room that day he came to know as Lord and God. And we are not surprised when we are told that those early Thomasite Christians of India "were the most missionary church of the East until the Moravians entered with Western Christianity."

Thomas was outwardly and by nature calm and cold, and yet beneath this icy exterior there ever glowed the volcano which the Master and the group heard rumbling, for the first time, so it seems, that day in Perea; but which, we may well believe, never ceased to glow and rumble until the end.

"God send us men whose aim will be,
 Not to defend some worn-out creed,
But to live out the laws of Christ
 In every thought and word and deed.

God send us men! God send us men!
 Patient, courageous, strong and true,
With vision clear and mind equipped,
 His will to learn, His work to do."

CHAPTER VII

JUDAS: FROM DEVOTED FRIEND TO DEADLY FOE

"Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor." Luke 6:16.

In the checkered story of our human race it is given to only a few to enjoy perpetual fame. Few indeed are those who, for one cause or another, fortunately or unfortunately, have so lived and acted as to be long remembered. One is remembered, like Christ, for some supreme achievement in behalf of humanity; another is remembered, like Nero, for some huge crime against humanity.

Now one of the most famous, or infamous, of those who have betrayed the highest hopes of the race is Judas Iscariot; and never on a human head has such a cloud justly descended as on that of this man who betrayed to death his Lord. No man in all human history has been regarded with such complete abhorrence; none by his deeds ever won for himself a more "frightful renown."

The Bible says little about Judas; his tragic life is told in a half-dozen brief sentences, his portrait has been sketched for us only in miniature, "and yet so vivid is each touch that the effect is a portrait etched in 'line of living fire.' "

"Judas" among the Hebrews was originally a very beautiful name, a name enshrining a beautiful meaning. It meant "praise," but because of Iscariot's unspeakable deed, the lovely name he bore was forever disgraced. It came to be associated only with basehearted treachery and villainy of the deepest dye. Judas did a thing which has caused the ages to heap universal contumely upon his name. He tarnished his name eternally by shedding the Innocent Saviour's blood.

Before Judas became a traitor, many were the persons who bore his noble name, but the beauty of the name and the use of it perished with him. Nobody for two thousand years has cared to have his name.

What an eloquent comment, this, on sin and sinful living! What a silent tribute to character! In all nations the names of the good are perpetuated in many a namesake. A good name is never allowed to die; such is the world's silent but salient tribute to goodness and greatness. But the Judases, the Brutuses, the Neroes—their names remain with us only as evil memories, whose recollection gives not pleasure, but a pang.

In the Orient there is said to be a tree which puts forth a beautiful leaf, then a red attractive flower, and afterwards a gall-apple filled with poisonous dust. It is called "the Judas tree."

That name touches nothing that it does not soil or hinder. It is said that no one who has seen the *Passion Play* at Oberammergau within the last quarter of a century or more, can forget the fiery-headed Judas and the marvelous realism of his acting. In olden times it was dangerous for anyone of the villagers to play his part, for to do so was to become so identified with that hated name as to impair his prosperity and social standing in the community.

The poet Dante in his *Inferno* places Judas next to Satan in the lowest region of hell, thereby indicating that the perfidy and inhumanity of which he was guilty were beyond forgiveness. Robert Browning pictures Judas as having lived in hell alone for nearly seventeen hundred years because there was none among the condemned who would speak to him. Such are the attempts of fancy to mete out justice to one who sinned so deeply.

Judas was the child of *now*. He took the short view of life. No splendid vision carried him forth into the future. He was devoid of imagination. Half the evil of the world would remain undone if men would take the long view of life. If Judas had allowed imagination to picture aforetime the sorry thing he did, he never would have done it. Like Esau, he contemplated what he had done too late. No one, not altogether devoid of imagination or faith, will wait until he treads the edge of the abyss to visualize what he has done. Judas is the Alcibiades of the Jews. He is the peer of all those two-minded ones of history whose careers have had auspicious beginnings, but melancholy endings. He was the bosom friend of Christ turned to be a mortal enemy.

I

Let us bring before us the scene of his treachery.

They are gathered, the disciples and the Master, in a certain Upper Room in Jerusalem. It is the last night which they shall spend on earth together. They have assembled to fellowship one with another, to eat together a parting friendship meal. According to custom, there has been prepared a supper of meat, and a "thin sweetish cake or biscuit made of wheaten meal, and a thick stew of fruit with bitter herbs."[1] The disciples are blissfully unaware of that which so greatly agitates and staggers the mind of Jesus—the approaching betrayal of Judas.

Perhaps the Master is wondering where Judas is just now. Will he come to the farewell Supper? Surely not. What desire can he have to attend such a meeting as they are going to hold?

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[1] *The Son of Man,* Emil Ludwig, Harcourt Brace & Co.

But to His perfect amazement, the traitor comes. In stalks Judas, hypocrite, traitor, sneak, schemer, thief. Bad at heart, he poses as good and kind in action. At first to all outward seeming all is well; but suddenly Jesus announces, "One of you shall betray me." The holy conclave is darkened by the sinister presence of the betrayer. A silence, sad and sinister, settles over the disconsolate band. Judas utters not a word until pressed. There is a spectral reason for his reticence. Spectral, too, are the tones in which Jesus finally addresses him: "What thou doest do quickly."

The fact is Judas has just returned from bargaining with the Jewish authorities and enemies of Jesus to betray Him into their hands. For a great while the Lord had known what Judas would do if he kept on going as he was. For more than a year now Jesus has seen cropping out, signs of his unmistakable infidelity. And what an almost unbearable grief it must have been to the Man of Sorrows to know that within His band there was one who had made a compact with hell. Daily of late Judas has been colleaguing with the devil. And time after time the Master has let fall a tactful, sorrowful hint of the growing greed for money and the decreasing love for Himself in the soul of Judas. Of late the Apostle has done many little deeds behind which his titanic avarice looms and plainly shines through. Avarice is now his ruling passion, and has its way with him. He has formed the habit of filching money from the common treasury. The misgivings of Christ are justified; His warnings, too, are timely. But to Judas they are, of course, unwelcome reminders; they rankle in the soul of the traitor. In every way Christ has proven a disappointment to Judas.

What a contrast is there between Iscariot and Christ! Iscariot means material things first; Christ means spiritual things first and uppermost. Judas tried to "Iscariotize" the Twelve. The Church has often been Iscariotized; is always in danger of it, in fact. It makes a world of difference whether the Church be dominated by Iscariot or Christ.

Judas has come to the place where he can only assuage his passion for vengeance by the betrayal of Him who has failed to fulfil his earthly dreams and material cravings. Jesus had long since disappointed these unworthy hopes. Judas feels the personal animus of disappointed ambition; has become the dreary, plotting, malcontent. Treason is now his one design, his solitary motive. He is vindictive, a turncoat, a traitor, but not yet avowedly so. For months, day and night, night and day, new plans have been churning in his mind. His evil brain is a seething caldron hatching schemes by which to get redress for fancied injuries. He has become an embittered man, full of complicity and duplicity, a specious trickster. And he is an embittered man because he is a man found out. Jesus sees him, and he knows it. For a great while now he has played double. He has come to be unscrupulous, free from all qualms of conscience, a vindictive opportunist waiting and watching for his chance.

The animus Judas now bears Jesus knows no bounds. From a loyal-minded disciple he has been transformed into an intriguer, an effete pigmy who has become ludicrous, glum. The long-standing defection had flowered, first into secret loathing. It then quickly ripened into treacherous designs; and at length into murderous intent. In short Judas has sold himself to sell Jesus, and he will not rest until the Victim is delivered.

His masters, the priests, know the manifold arts of the seducer and succeed in using Judas as their ready tool and accomplice. They are the master craftsmen in the art of deceit; he in the art of calumny. They spread their net for Judas; he spreads his for Jesus. Jesus is taken; but both Judas and these priests are more effectually taken than is He—and in the nets of their own weaving, too! Iscariot had betrayed all along that lack of human sympathy which approaches cynicism and eventually leads into it. Now at long last prompted by wicked malice he makes common cause with his Master's foes, bribing them to bribe him, so to speak. Judas has surreptitiously visited the scribes by night, a thing which proves him diabolical rather than infirm. He is now a soulless man, a chaos of trickery and deceit.

Now we shall see a demonstration of love and patience such as is nowhere to be found, even in the life of the Master—save on Calvary later. For shortly after the arrival of Judas from the court of the priests where he has pledged his aid in destroying his Master, Jesus proceeds to wash the disciples' feet, Judas among them. For Him to touch any of their feet was an act of rare affability; and to touch those of the traitor, into whom, Saint John says, Satan had already entered, was the proof of unimagined magnanimity.

But the supreme example of the urbanity and love of Christ which passeth knowledge, is shown at the beginning of the meal when Jesus gives the sop to Judas.

In the Orient of Jesus' day it was the custom at a banquet or dinner of note for the host to dip a piece of bread or meat into the broth or gravy and give it to the guest, whom, above all others, he wished to honor. The sop was a mark of special consideration and respect. Now we read that when Jesus "had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon"! Remember Jesus knows what is in the mind of Judas; He knows that for a long time he has been an unblushing double-dealer; He knows that at this very moment black treachery lurks in his soul; and He knows, too, that he has just come from hobnobbing with the priests. Yes, the Master knows how close to the very rim of hell the false disciple now walks, but He has not yet given him up. With infinite pity and kindness, in one last desperate effort to save the soul of the traitor, He gives him the sop of friendship, hoping even now to turn him from his foolhardy design. It is the Saviour's brave, beautiful, and final effort on behalf of the sinking Judas. Will he respond to the Master's proffered love and friendship? Oh that he would! O Judas, Judas, stay thyself!

Rihbany in his *Syrian Christ* says, "It is never expected that any person would hand such a sop to one for whom he cherished no friendship. To the one who carried in his hand and heart a murderous plot against the loving Master, Jesus handed the sop of friendship, the morsel which is never offered to an enemy."[1] We do not wonder that St. John says, "After the sop Satan entered into him"; for how could one who is a traitor at heart accept the gift of true friendship without being transformed into the very spirit of treason? This special kindness, His proffered love, would either shame the traitor out of his purposed crime, or make him more determined in it. Like every choice one makes, it would quickly make him better or vastly worse. It was the latter which happened. He took the sop.

The last thing has been done to retard the pitward descent of Judas, and Jesus with the sternness characteristic of betrayed love, says, "What thou doest do quickly." With a rare stroke of his pen John tells us, "He went immediately out: *and it was night!*" Out into the night went Judas—himself carrying the blacker night in his murky heart; outside and inside the traitor, all was night. For him there was no light anywhere now; soon he will be swallowed up in the shadows of moral ruin. Had he not eaten the friendship morsel his deed would not have been so black. But to eat at all with one at the table was to pledge him one's loyalty. The disciples had stood agape with wonderment at the colossal perfidy of this one of their circle; and Jesus gave expression to his horrible crime in the bitter wail of the Psalmist, whose closest friend had become his bitterest foe, "He that *eateth bread* with me hath lifted up his heel against me!" That was the crime of crimes, the peak of perfidy, the height of villainy, a foul and frightful act of treachery.

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[1] Quoted by permission of Houghton, Mifflin Company, *Publishers*, Boston.

This calls to mind Jean Valjean's vile deed in the home of the Christly Bishop, which Victor Hugo draws for us, than which, it has been said, "No fairer type was ever drawn in literature." Jean has just been discharged from the galleys. He wanders in need of food and lodging, but no house is open to him. Everyone drives him away, even the dog when he tries to crawl into a dog house.

Desperate, almost exhausted, he raps at a door which a woman has told him sometimes opens to such as he when no other does. Jean is met by a priest; he supposes it to be the parish priest, but it is the Bishop; he is actually in the episcopal palace. The evening meal is spread and Jean eats violently. The Bishop has the silver placed on the table and treats the convict as an honored guest. Soon he lights him to bed. Jean sleeps soundly. He awakens in the small hours of the morning, greatly refreshed. Remembering the silver, he rises, takes it from where he saw it placed, leaps out of the window, and is gone—a dastardly deed!

In the morning there is a great stir. Soon officers come dragging the convict into the Bishop's presence. "Are you back?" says the Bishop to the thief, and shows him nothing but kindness. He arises and takes from the mantle the candlesticks worth two hundred francs, and gives them to Jean. The officers are astonished. Impossible! Then the Bishop comes close to Jean and says: "My brother, I have bought your soul for God", and the hardened convict, touched for the moment, goes out into a harsh world to struggle with that act of unheard of kindness. Nevertheless, he still commits crimes; it is his habit.

But love finally conquers Jean, whereas it never does Judas; the difference, some would say, between fiction and reality. Alas for the cynics! Night! Discord, jealousy, treachery, ostracism, and betrayal are in the air. Night! Not the time of rest from honorable toil and self-giving service, but the cover for evil deeds. Night of remorse, growing inkier and blacker, illuminated only by the torches of those who seek the Betrayed; night of dark events rushing on to climax. Judas, now as never, is prodigal with energy; as coolly crafty as Iago. With frightful courage he strides toward crime. Desire for retaliation has thickened his blood so that pity or shame cannot flow along his veins.

Here is the breathless record of the steps whereby a noble nature plunges to perdition; the pathetic figure of a great soul gone wrong. None has suspected, not even Jesus until lately, that he would plunge into such depths of villainy. What must be the punishment for violation of such hospitality? It is no fault of ours that this cool destroyer of the Innocent fails to arouse our sympathy. He is the premier of villains; his act the nadir of infamy, an act without excuse, since he knew a right course of action.

In Jerusalem where all the prophets have perished the net is now spread to compass the death of the greatest of them all. For Christ the rood has already been prepared. This holy city, this city of a thousand sacred memories and a thousand hideous crimes, now pants for the blood of *the* Prophet.

If it were possible to add to the depth of Iscariot's crime, his act of kissing the Master in the garden later in the evening would deepen it. Jesus sees Judas approaching and says, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" Even the officers are paralysed by His words. *"Friend"!* It has been suggested that this is the courtesy of dignity, and doubtless in Jesus "dignity was at war with loathing", but this is more than courtesy springing from dignity; it is love that will not let even a Judas go. That was a kiss at once affable and monstrous. The kiss in the East is a sign not only of close intimacy, but of great esteem. In this act of cool villainy the man of Kerioth gave the Man of Nazareth his final and supreme shock: *"Judas, betrayest thou the son of man with a kiss?"* Jesus was horrified. His soul, though accustomed by now to treason, was amazed at the calmness with which this false friend added yet another crime to his already unspeakable one.

"An open foe may prove a curse,
But a pretended friend is worse."

II

Peter's denial was a great sin: in some respects like this of Judas'; but between them there is a gulf as wide as the world. Peter's was a momentary and unintentional denial, while the act of Judas was a deliberate, studied, and carefully-planned betrayal. He worked out his plot with the steadfast eye of a genius, and executed it with the artfulness of a past master at crime, and all with an unfaltering hand to the dreadful conclusion. "He will not stir," as one puts it, "till he is sure of his compact; he studies with astute intelligence the hour and place of his crime; all is as planned and as orderly as the strategy of some great battle." After long and shrewd maneuvering he brings to an artful consummation his cunningly-planned and astutely-executed *coup d'état.*

It is the purposed deception of Judas that we hate. If he had broken away from Christ when in his heart he first despised Him, we could more easily forgive him; but to the last he was the deadly foe acting the rôle of the devoted friend. His shameful and shameless question at the table when Jesus announces the presence of a traitor sickens our finest sensibilities. When they say, "Lord, is it I?" Judas also parrots the phrase. In brazen perversity he too asks, *"Lord, is it I?"*

Another difference in the denial of Peter and the betrayal of Judas is this: Judas went out, *and it was night;* Peter went out and *wept.* Peter repented and was reinstated; Judas did nothing more than regret, he sank into the hell of remorse. Perhaps remorse has done more harm than irreverence. As F. W. Robertson has said, "It was remorse that fixed Judas in an unalterable destiny." The eyes of Peter were quickly suffused with the hot tears of terrible agony; but Judas had no tears, only stolid defiance, a frozen and sullen heart. Jesus forgave Peter because He could, since Peter repented; but He could not forgive Judas, for Judas did not repent.

The traitor has won his victory, but victory is a horrible and shadowy thing if hell be its outcome. The star of Judas pales, his sky is overcast. Remorse, worse than death, has its way with him. He is a poignant sight. Listen to that hoarse voice echoing in the Temple there, "I have sinned in that I have destroyed innocent blood." So says the traitor to the priests in whose hire he is. But these fellows have no more use for their miserable tool. The tool has served its purpose: it shall be cast away. "What is that to us? See thou to that."

He had been banished from the company of the good; he is now banished from the company of the *bad*. He has murdered his soul. He can no longer endure himself. With alacrity he rushes toward destruction. He sees his mistake, but the rancor engendered in him by that same fatal mistake spurs him on. Like a gambler who sees that he has made an irretrievable blunder, he is impelled by the hurry of his ever downward-plunging to plunge yet deeper. He goes forth quickly and madly hangs himself. Such is the way of the transgressor.

These conscienceless priests have used the venal Judas as a pawn in their artful game to compass the ruin of the Galilean; and though he was himself an accomplished trickster, a connoisseur at cunning, yet he had fallen a victim of their matchless cupidity and craft. The animus with which he now regarded Christ and his sordid love of money had made him gullible and powerless to resist their shrewd cajolery and canny stratagems.

There is something very arresting, if deplorably sad, in that word of John's, already alluded to, about the departure of Judas that evening from the Upper Room—"He went immediately out: and it was night." Was there ever such a night as that? Within, there was light and love, if sadness; and the sweetest fellowship known, if sorrow. But outside it was *dark,* indeed. Judas had been driven out into the blackness of the night, not by Jesus—though the Master, knowing what he was doing, told him to hasten and finish it —but by his own heart. Men whose deeds are evil shun the light and seek naturally the darkness as their native element.

Imagine the intolerable loneliness of Judas now! He has made his bed in hell. We have here the consummation of sin. Sin isolates, estranges, separates; that is its work. The man who has an ideal or a friend is not lonely; but sin shatters ideals, it snaps the ties of friendship; it separates man from man, and man from God. Judas might have been at that moment where John was—on the bosom of the Lord, instead of where he was—in the midnight of woe. What is hell but separation from God and the good? The truest thing this man can say of himself now is:

"Me miserable! Whither shall I fly?
Each way I fly is hell! Myself am hell!"

At this point St. Matthew says: "Judas his betrayer saw he was condemned, and repented: he brought back the thirty silver pieces to the high priests and elders, saying, "I did wrong to betray innocent blood." "What does it matter to us?" they rejoined; "it is your affair, not ours!" Then he flung the silver down in the Temple and went and hanged himself. Did someone say, there is no such thing as tainted money; that money is non-moral? Here is one who has succeeded in earning some money, the money is his, but these thirty coins blister the hands of the owner. He hurries to throw them away, and overtaken by a tremendous wave of moral shame, goes forth and madly destroys himself. And—

> "Still, as of old,
> Man by himself is priced.
> For thirty pieces Judas sold
> Himself, not Christ."

III

What made Judas do this thing? Why did he betray his Master?

There are those who say he did not intend to betray Christ into the hands of His enemies. They would set the traitor in a more favorable light by saying that he was only trying to force Jesus to assume the Messianic rôle, to show Himself the Messiah-King. Judas—say these apologists for the traitor—would have his Master cease to be the lowly Galilean teacher, don the attire and wield the sceptre of the Great King. Then the hope of Jews would be realized, then the Kingdom would come.

These Judas apologists say—and in this say truly—that Judas, like John the Baptist and all other pious Jews who looked for the soon-coming in of the Kingdom, had grown impatient. He knew Christ to be an extraordinary Person possessing great powers. Why did He not take up the aggressive and glorious rôle of David's Son? But instead He refused the proffered kingship; He denounced the provincialism, the nativism, the narrow patriotism of the Jewish rulers; He repeatedly discouraged His disciples in their dreams of a temporal kingdom, saying that His Kingdom was not of this world, but an intangible kingdom within the hearts of men. This, I say, is true.

But when Jesus spoke of His death at the hands of his enemies, Judas felt his heart sink. His hopes were blasted. He had no interest in a spiritual kingdom such as Jesus now talked of. He had allied himself with Christ because He gave promise of fulfilling the current Jewish idea of a kingdom of the world. But when his dream of this kind of kingdom was shattered he was through with Jesus. It is altogether unconvincing to say that Judas betrayed Jesus from patriotic and altruistic motives. But it has been done.

Thus a scheming, plotting traitor is ingeniously turned into a frantic hero, who, at the worst, was caught in the toils of a disappointing circumstance; one who resorted to unwise tactics to accomplish a worthy end.

But in the light of all the facts such a view is unwarranted. These friends of the traitor do him too much honor. The evangelists know nothing of any such motive in him. They all alike charge up his crime to the progress of avarice and sin in his soul. And never could they rid themselves of the embarrassing and repugnant fact that the deed was done by "one of the twelve."

Now, if for any reason the apostles could have been in error about Judas, or if they had been too harsh with him, not so with Jesus. Judas would get justice from Jesus. What is the verdict of Jesus? He who was incarnate fairness could of Judas utter no defense. The truest thing He could say of this once promising disciple was that he had proven to be "the son of perdition". He had previously referred to him as "a devil", and He could but admit, "in words of immeasurable woe", that "good were it for that man if he had never been born". Look where we will for any justification of Judas' knavery, we come back saying, "inexcusable, monstrous!" We are persuaded that those who knew him best judged him most fairly; that they were right when they called him "a thief", "the betrayer", "the traitor", "a devil", and "the son of perdition".

IV

But Judas was not a devil from the beginning. He was once an innocent child in his mother's arms. Those lips which kissed the Sinless One in the act of betrayal were once fondly pressed by a mother's love. Ah, that mother—if she had known that her dimpled babe should become a monster of iniquity!—but God sees to it that mothers do not foresee the worst, and it is well.

> "The mother of Iscariot
> Was never done
> Telling the women at the well,
> Or in the market-place,
> Or on the windy roofs
> At set of sun,
> How of the twelve He chose
> To follow Him—
> *Her* son was one!"[1]

The day had been when he was an innocent lad who played and laughed with other boys in the streets of Kerioth, and his laughter was as innocent, his heart as pure as theirs. He had been an earnest youth, sufficiently religious and promising to be singled out by Jesus for discipleship among the chosen Twelve.

But from the start Judas had had his weakness. Just as Peter's besetting sin was waywardness, and John's was quick temper, so that of Judas was lukewarmness and avarice. His liking for money was probably what made him the treasurer of the company. Says Dr. A. B. Bruce, "He got to carry the bag, we imagine, because the other disciples were all supremely careless about money matters." But not Iscariot. More and more he cared for money; and Jesus viewed his growing proclivities to money and the material with increasing alarm.

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[1] *Christ in the Poetry of Today,* Elvira Slack, *Ed.,* The Woman's Press.

On several occasions Jesus seems to be laboring to rescue Judas from the ruin toward which he is speeding. Was it to his divided, money-loving soul that He spoke when He said: "Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth"! One wonders if this was not spoken especially for the ears of Judas—an effort to forestall the sad consequences of an evident waning interest in things spiritual. But if so it failed, and Jesus, it would seem, offers Judas the opportunity to assume open and avowed hostility to Him, thus sparing him the odium which would attach to him as a traitor.

The Master had reached the place in His career where many, disillusioned and disgruntled at His refusal to become the bread-and-butter Messiah which they expected, were going away from Him. He turned to the Twelve and said,—speaking as I think very especially to Judas—"Will ye also go away?" Here was his chance to quit being a hypocrite, a chance openly to show his disapproval of Jesus. It was a chance which doubtless Jesus hoped Judas would take, but he did not. He remained in His company as though loyal and in complete sympathy with Him. How could the Master keep from loathing such duplicity? And yet He continues, as we have seen, to treat him with the utmost kindness and deference to the end.

The notion that Judas was chosen from the beginning to play the part of traitor is unthinkable. Christ chose Judas not to fail, but to achieve; not to betray Him, but to help Him save the world. Nor did Judas become a follower of Jesus with treacherous intentions. Jesus knew that in Judas there were great possibilities both for good and evil. He chose him, aiming to bring his potential good to its best, and school the evil away.

Judas was a man of business ability; was well endowed with practical sagacity and sound judgment. Christ needed such men. (He needs them today.) But will Judas respond to the Master's spiritual training? Jesus does not know. He will see. If he does, who can predict to what heights Judas may rise? But if he clings to the low, who can tell to what depths he may sink. And of whom is this not true? This matter is well summed up in these words: "Christ chose Judas to be an apostle, not a traitor, but Judas eventually chose to be a traitor, not an apostle". When selected by Christ to stand in the apostolic company, Judas had the possibility of an angel, but all the same he became a devil. Jesus had wonderful capacity for seeing the ripe fruit in the green apple, but in the case of Judas the fruit rotted before it ripened. Plainly Jesus was disappointed. And just so may any one fail and disappoint God.

V

Our text makes it plain that Judas was a case of tragic degeneration. He *became* a traitor. All of that last year Jesus had trembled for Judas. His habitual pilfering from the bag had become notorious. When Mary anointed Christ with the costly ointment, Judas was angry. He said it was an inexcusable waste; it might have been sold for a good sum and given to the poor. But John writing the story afterward says Judas said that "because he was a thief, and having the bag, took away what was put therein". To his complaint against the woman's beautiful act Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has wrought a good work upon me; . . . she did it for my burying." These words would doubtless enrage Judas all the more. A dead Messiah! What did he care for a dead King? Was he to lose everything? It was now plain to him that disaster was imminent; the ship was sinking; he must grab what he can and leap. He slunk away from Bethany that night and made his way into the council-room of the priests at Jerusalem: "What will ye give me," he said, "and I will betray Him to you?" The bargain was fixed at thirty pieces of silver.

"O tragedy past tongue to tell
That ever mortal should
By compact with the tribes of hell
Pour out our Saviour's blood!
And that for just a bit of gold
The fleshly hand of man could hold!"

But was this appalling deed done "for just a bit of gold"? Did Judas sell his Master for the paltry sum of fifteen dollars? That alone? One cannot think so. No, it was more than avarice which prompted his crime: it was sheer badness become unbearable in the presence of unsullied goodness. If at the beginning the one passion of Judas had been to amass money he never would have joined the homeless Carpenter of Galilee. Surely to take up with this Wanderer, who had not where to lay His head, would not be a rapid way to make money!

Judas was the man whom Jesus could not make. He is a fine study in the failure of environment. That attractive dictum of Tennyson's, "I am a part of all that I have met", must contain general truth, but it did not hold good in Judas' case. He spent years of intimate companionship with Christ, but Christ became no real part of him. Nor is it true that circumstances make the man. Who was ever better circumstanced than Judas? Think what wonderful sights he had seen—all the miracles of Jesus! What wonderful words he had heard—all His preaching and teaching! But these stirred no wonderful feelings in Judas. That was his trouble; he was cold, prosaic, nonchalant. He could never get excited about religion, nor, indeed, much interested in it. The conversion of Matthew from the corrupt life of a swindler, or Mary Magdalene from a life of shame, made no impression on him. Judas was the child of privilege. For three years he companioned with the Light of the world, yet in the end chose darkness.

"Allowed to sit at His dear feet
And know that look of love,
And walk with Him in pastures sweet,
And then a traitor prove!
To know the glory of his light
And then to choose the rayless night!"

VI

Warning! We are tempted to think of Judas as having been such an outrageously evil character that his experience has no guidance for ourselves. We think it not possible for us to do what he did, and assume therefore that his life holds no lesson for us. This would be so if Judas had been a foredoomed villain, but he was not. He was your average man with average faults, faced by temptations quite common to all. Though he was in constant association with Christ and the good, yet just like so many nowadays, he permitted Christ to do nothing for him. To the contrary sin had its way with him, and, despite the efforts of Jesus, ruined him.

And we must not so palliate the sin of Judas as to blunt the healthy abhorrence of it. We must not think of him as a sinner apart and alone, with a nature so different from our own that to us he can be no example. This said, however, there is but one verdict to be rendered in his case, the safe, yet startling word of Peter: "*Judas went to his own place.*" But does not every one go to his own place—the place in eternity which he has fashioned for himself in time? the place there which he has made for himself in life here? Of course one may easily say too much here, but it is difficult to conceive the place to which Judas went as an hospitable one. No man can unlive the life that he has lived; Judas least of all. He has done the irrevocable.

> "This is life's final tragedy—
> Judas forever Judas must be—
> Forever Judas—despised, decried—
> Jesus was only crucified."

Christ set before Judas a high and spiritual possibility, but he clung ever to the material and the low. Everything depended on his choice. And just so—

> "To every man there openeth
> A way and ways and a way;
> And the high soul climbs the high way,
> And the low soul gropes the low—
> And in between, on the misty flats,
> The rest drift to and fro—
> But to every man there openeth
> A high way and a low;
> And every man decideth
> Which way his soul shall go." [1]

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[1] John Oxenham, Doubleday, Doran & Co., *Publishers.* Used by permission.

CHAPTER VIII

PILATE: THE MORAL WEAKLING

"Pilate saith unto them, What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?"—Matthew 27:22.

Does the age make the man or the man the age? Do crises, events, and eras create men after their own hearts and in their own images, or do men create these? Every notable event or crisis has a way all its own of producing "the man of the hour". Every era throws up, so to speak, men characteristic of itself, but strong men fashion and dominate their times more than their times fashion and dominate them. The man who is spiritually strong will give strength and character to his age, whereas the morally weak man will be the dupe of his age. The one will adorn, advance his age; the other will cause it to degenerate with himself.

One can think of no better examples of these two types of men than Jesus Christ, on the one hand, and Pontius Pilate on the other.

A man cannot help being the child of his particular age, but no man need be the dupe of his age. Jesus was the son of a harsh and senile age, yet He was neither harsh nor senile; but the most human and alert Man of history. He was not like His age; He rose above His age. He flung Himself against it, and by the impact of His titanic spirituality, altered it. Scion of His age? Yes; but for all that, the Man of the Ages, too. This last first. He was far ahead of His time; was then, is yet.

Pilate mirrors the worst of this time. In him the weakness of that age of iron and blood and physical prowess is personalized. Jesus and Pilate were products of the same age, but what a universe of difference between them! Not the age, but *the bent of my soul* determines my life and fixes my destiny.

"One ship sails east
And one sails west
By the self-same wind that blows;
It's the set of the sails
And not the gales
That determines the way it goes.

"And like the winds of the sea
Are the ways of fate,
As we journey on through life;
'Tis the set of the soul
That determines the goal,
And not the stress and the strife."[1]

1. The Procurator

Pilate comes upon the page of Scripture in one of history's darkest hours. Men are in the act of putting to death the world's greatest prophet. Here in little Palestine the stage is set. The curtains are ready to fall. The most tragic drama of the ages is about to be enacted, and, in the plenitude of their powers, Jesus of Nazareth and Pilate of Rome face each other as the chief actors.

Only a few years before Pilate had been made governor of Judea by the emperor. He was a man possessing the gift of statecraft, a measure of fairmindedness, and other elements of strength, but was of a hard, cruel, obstinate nature, a mixture of cunning and arrogance. From several sources we learn that he was a man of hot and imperious temper, lacking in tact, and altogether pitless toward those who dared obstruct his plans. He was a proud and scornful man who despised the Jews while fearing them.

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[1] From *Poems* of Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

The Jews of this period were the most difficult to govern of all Rome's subjects. They were a turbulent and heady people, and their thousand sects were united only in the hate of their Roman masters. They held theirs to be the only true religion, the religion, because it was true (as a matter of fact it was now in sad decay), which should supplant all others. To be compelled to submit to a foreign people of pagan faith was, therefore, the most galling humiliation. Such a thing discredited their theology and stung their national and religious pride. To the Jews Pilate was a loathsome stranger, a detested barbarian. Their leaders gave him no end of trouble; they hated him, and were as cordially hated by him. He scorned their religious zeal as cant. He took delight in setting at nought their rigid moral regulations; but usually to his sorrow.

Pilate had queered himself with the Jews at the beginning. He had made Jerusalem the headquarters of his army, had established the Roman garrison there. Of the garrison the Jews were very contemptuous; it was a constant and unpleasant reminder of their galling servitude.

Pilate went farther; he had emblazoned on the army ensigns great gleaming portraits of the emperor as God. To this the Jews took violent exception. This was a profanation of their sacred law, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." They organized a revolt. For days Jerusalem was the scene of angry riots. They demanded that the governor remove the odious images. He refused. They grew furious and insistent. He remained obdurate. They persisted.

Finally Pilate became so exasperated that he threatened to put them all to death if they did not submit. But such a threat had no terror for the frenzied host, they bared their throats and dared his soldiers to kill them. But so many people could not be massacred. Pilate was forced to yield, hating them while he did so. This left relations between governor and people in a strained and tense condition.

The governor had made himself yet more odious by taking money from the sacred treasury of the Temple and using it for his own purposes. This was a sacrilege which no pious Jew could pardon. But most of all Pilate was hated for his savage habit of executing Jews for minor offenses. He was an absolute wolf for Jewish blood. More than once his atrocious deeds had sent a cold shudder through the land. Once he wantonly slaughtered certain Galileans, mingling their blood with their sacrifices while they worshipped. (Was this what made Herod his enemy?)

Pilate was a surly, insolent man, full of boundless contempt for his subjects and getting the same from them with increase. None can distribute contempt and receive adulation. Toward religion he was sarcastic, skeptical, scornful. Religion to him meant superstition.

Pilate was a cynic. Cynicism is usually a mask for the cynic's sensuality. He had come to where he could no longer respect himself, and despising himself, he decreed that man is despicable. He was an indifferent secularist. Now religious fanatics, like the Jewish rulers, are to be deplored, but secular fanatics, like Pilate, are worse. In politics Pilate was subtle, cryptic, secret as a mole. He was temperamentally a choleric, eccentric, churlish man. By nature superstitious, fearsome, shy, he was as cold as a serpent, and as sly and an adept at gibes and bluff. To him life seemed a hollow thing. The years had embittered his spirit. He had met guile with cunning, and diplomacy with duplicity until the man that he was had slowly given place to the beastial. The better traits of his character had all but atrophied. He was still an accomplished statesman, but a small man.

Indifference to the moral demands of life will bring any man to where black and white, right and wrong, look alike. Such was the case with Pilate. Such indifference is an unerring sign of moral decline and a weak will. Pilate was faced by problems which demanded force of character and moral integrity. He had neither. He was dealing with Jewish prelates who were devoid of principle and as crafty as Ulysses. His vacillation was no match for their unswerving persistence and fanatical fervor.

Pilate was justly loathed for his heartlessness to the Jews, but the thing which will make him notorious forever was his shameful treatment of Jesus Christ. So long as men repeat the Christian Creed, the phrase "Suffered under Pontius Pilate", shall heap contumely upon the unhappy head of the Roman procurator of Judea, and hand down his name to eternal execration. "Pontius Pilate"—that name will be forever associated with the darkest crime of history. No mistaking this, it was Pilate who crucified our Lord. Christ was not killed by irresponsible Roman soldiers (they were but the unfortunate instruments of His death), but by a feeble Roman governor. It was Caesar's viceroy, backed by Caesar's strong arm, moving in Caesar's proud power, that killed Jesus. The procurator made a show of placing that responsibility on the people. He publicly washed his hands and went through the solemn farce of trying to evade all blame for the deed, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person. See ye to it." Thus was Jesus "by impious show of law condemned". But the stain of blood was on Pilate's hands and Pilate's heart, and water could not wash it off. Without Pilate's consent Jesus could not have been killed.

In an effort to relieve the blackness of Pilate's deed, it has been said that he was not so much wicked as weak, not so much a criminal as a coward. But moral weakness is close akin to wickedness. Pilate knew Jesus to be innocent, yet he suffered Him to be murdered. He knew the right, but *did* the wrong. He would have liked to set Jesus free, and would have, if it had cost him nothing; but the mob, goaded by their powerful leaders, howled for His death. With amazing inconsistency Pilate had Jesus scourged, hoping this would appease the thirst of these yelping human hounds for His blood; but it did not, and he finally sentenced Him to death, while using every kind of underhand maneuver to free Him—if for no other reason, to spite the Jews.

Pilate was a sail-trimmer, a champion fence-straddler. He had a string of cartilage where he ought to have had a backbone. He was a spineless, weak-kneed, pussy-footing man. He knew what he ought to do, but was too cowardly to do it. What is this but the *ne plus ultra* of wickedness? Are we not guilty who permit an evil which we had the power to prevent? It *was* weakness, but moral weakness is wickedness; and moral weakness, as Pilate demonstrates, makes one capable of *any* wickedness.

2. The Trial

At the opening of this amazing trial the Jews brought three charges against Jesus. They said He perverted the nation; He forbade to pay taxes to Caesar; and He called Himself a King.

Not one of these had been mentioned at His trial before the Jewish court. The Sanhedrin had sentenced Him for blasphemy, "because he made himself the Son of God". But such a charge, they knew, would carry no weight with Pilate. What interest would their pagan governor have in One who made the absurd claim to be the son of the gods? Such religious bickerings he would only scorn. To mention such a charge would be to get themselves laughed out of court. So they manufactured charges coming within the sphere of his interest, and calculated to arrest his attention.

They said He was a disturber of the national tranquility, a stirrer-up of the people. Pilate, cold, blunt, and forbidding; Jesus of lordly mien. For a moment they stand face to face. "One of them is armed, and clad in a short toga; the other is weaponless, and wears a long gray mantle." They exchange thoughts, beggar and lord. Both fight for their lives. In his mailed hand Pilate holds the destiny of Jesus, but the beggar is more of a king than the governor. The procurator looked the Prisoner over. Where were the marks of the insurrectionist? His face was peaceful and impressive beyond any the governor had ever seen. One long look into that face of noble seriousness convinced Pilate that this Man was no trouble-maker. Alone they had a few words together. Jesus assured the governor that He had no revolutionary designs. He was not a captain of armies, but of ideas. Pilate concluded that for envy they had arraigned Him, and ignored this first charge.

The second charge was taken up—that he forbade to pay imperial tribute. This was a flagrant falsehood, for that very week they had asked Him whether He considered it patriotic and right to pay tribute to Caesar, and He said yes: "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's." (Here was in golden miniature the world's first Bill of Rights.) The truth is they hated Him for acknowledging that Caesar had any rights whatever among them. But now in the presence of the governor they feign heroic loyalty to the emperor. Pilate must have seen through their hypocrisy. But with what skill did the spirit of evil now wave the banner of the angels! Even the unscrupulous governor was amazed at the diabolic cleverness of these ecclesiastical mountebanks who could twist a moral precept into a thousand subtleties and lose all sight of morality or truth.

The third charge was more subtle, and had in it more of truth, though much perverted. It was one that the governor could not well ignore—that Jesus claimed to be a king.

Could it be that here was a rival to the emperor? Pilate knew that his master on the Tiber would brook no rival nor tolerate anyone making a kingly claim. No doubt he at once saw through the absurdity of the charge. He could see in the Galilean Jesus no danger to Caesar's throne. But what if there might be? What if it were so? What would happen to him as Caesar's trusted viceroy if he did not look well into, and report any such claim? He must investigate this charge. And so he enquired of Jesus cynically, if not mockingly, "Art *thou* a king then?" "Yes," replied Jesus, "to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness of the truth." The political confusion of the times made it dangerous to speak of a Kingdom of God, yet Jesus boldly uses the term, even before Pilate His judge. Jesus a king! This was interesting, strange, naive. Things were getting more serious now.

Pilate stared at Jesus quizzically, his eyes blank with wonder. This Man might be deluded, but He was for all that, enthralling. Jesus went on to speak of His kingdom as the realm of Truth. It was a kingdom, He said, very different from the empire of Caesar: "My kingdom is not of this world." Caesar's was an earthly kingdom, a kingdom of soldiers and citadels and swords and conquered continents; His was the intangible, eternal, world-wide kingdom of Truth, and all doers of truth everywhere, He said, were His subjects, gratefully acknowledging His sway. "Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice—acknowledges me King."

3. What Is Truth?

Jesus was angling for Pilate's soul. But Pilate had no interest in any such fairyland kingdom. Such abstract vagaries charmed him not. The Roman engrossed in deeds rather than thought, queried lightly, "What is truth?" He was a man accustomed to action, given to dispatch, and the tedium of reasoning was foreign to him, nettled him. But nothing could reach Pilate's heart now, he had none; it was dead. He has given free rein to the animal instincts until they have destroyed his capacity for manhood; have put out the eyes of the soul. *Truth!* The word lingered with Pilate for a moment, but only a moment, and was gone. He passed out to Jesus' foes. This man, he was sure, was innocent and quite harmless. Plainly there was in this high-souled dreamer no cause for alarm. To the people he said, "I find no fault in him at all."

To Pilate's way of thinking, Jesus was more an object of pity than alarm. Francis Bacon believed that Pilate's question about truth was a jest. "What is truth: said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer." Pilate probably was not jeering or jesting, as Bacon thought, but clearly there was little of reverence or earnestness in his query.

He is no penitent truth-seeker, this man; rather he is trifling with the living, eternal Truth, and at the peril of his soul. He resorts to phrase-mongering, by which he tries to cloak his real purpose, which is to sentence Jesus, since it can make little difference to his personal fortune or future. Pilate is eloquent in the use of the insincere verbiage of the lawyer. He mouths a naive sophism, "What is truth?" and reveals his total indifference to the whole question of truth by refusing to probe the matter further. Pilate will not open his eyes lest he see the light. He has tampered with truth until truth and the lie are one and the same to him. One cannot in a given crisis of life will to be true if one's life-habit has been false. Pilate has not been honest, is not now, yet his question comes from a lonely, half-earnest, bewildered soul.

Jesus had been tried and found innocent. The governor talked of releasing Him, thereby ignoring the action of the Jewish court. But the priests and their minions raised a furious clamor. They launched new accusations against Jesus, and emitted a torrent of fiery invective upon the governor which was as prophetic of evil as the ominous hiss of snakes.

Pilate wavers. He quails before the rabble. He has not the courage to do the thing he wants to do.

These were grueling hours for the Master. All morning long the swashbuckling priests have brought made-to-order charges against Him. The multitude of Jewish flamingoes is now giving itself up to railleries and ribaldries of the direst sort. All Jerusalem has become a mob of snarling, threatening human hyenas howling for this man's blood. This presaged ill for Jesus. The outcome would be His death. That was clear; yet He is the only calm Person in the stormy assemblage. And through it all He had maintained for the most part, the majesty of silence. Seldom had He spoken, but when He had, it was in awesome tones—words which to His superficial judge were ominous, mysterious.

The excited mob clamored on. The distracted governor now turned to Jesus and asked Him if He heard what they witnessed against Him. To the ludicrous query His only answer is the disturbing one of complete silence. Again Pilate stares at Him quizzically in great wonderment. The governor is getting flustered. It begins to dawn on him now that he is in a considerable plight, and he is most contemptuous of those who have dragged him into it. He hates to be browbeaten into a crime which he loathes; moreover, it will be yielding once more to his enemies. He is upset, spiritless, nervous. What shall he do?

4. Herod Antipas

Suddenly from the cries of the crowd he catches the word "Galilee". One fellow said, "He stirreth up the people from Galilee to this place." To Pilate it was a welcome hint. Jesus is a Galilean. Herod is the ruler of Galilee; he is in Jerusalem now. He would send Jesus to Herod. It seemed like a flash of genius and good fortune. Pilate purred with contentment. Was not this the way out of his predicament? Would this not end the odious embarrassment? Pilate thought so. He was in a delirium of delight.

To Herod Jesus goes.

Four times in this trial Jesus was "handed over" to others on the plea that He was their affair. The high priest handed Him over to Pilate. Pilate handed Him over to Herod. Herod handed Him back to Pilate. Pilate finally handed Him over to be crucified by the Jews, saying as he did so, that it wasn't his fault; it was their affair. But these were only base maneuvers in the effort to shirk an unpleasant duty, to sidestep a moral responsibility.

And are we not still playing the circular game? Are we not still passing the Master and His demands on us over to others, saying glibly, in effect, as we do so, "It's your affair"? But like them of old, we err and do not recognize the truth. Jesus *was* Pilate's affair. He *was* Herod's affair. He *was* the high priest's affair. Jesus is every man's affair. He cannot be sidestepped; and the effort to do so can but prove morally disastrous to the one attempting it.

"The whole trial of Jesus is a looking glass for humanity. In the play of motives that conspired to bring Jesus to the cross, in the X-ray light which the drama throws on human character, we see ourselves and our actions vividly portrayed.

"It is easy to judge these struggling cowards desperately searching for an *alibi*—until we pause to think how often we do the same thing. When moral responsibility comes home to us, it is very common and comforting to shove it on to someone else."[1] A better attitude is expressed in these words of a recent poem:

"I see the crowd in Pilate's hall
I mark their wrathful mien;
Their shouts of 'Crucify!' appall,
With blasphemy between.

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[1] Quoted from editorial in *Western Christian Advocate,* March 29, 1928.

And of that shouting multitude
I feel that I am one;
And in that din of voices rude
I recognize my own."

But how different it would have been if someone had broken through that vicious circle of evasion and prevented the crime. Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas, any one of them could have done it. It is cowardly and disastrous to pass on to others those duties and tasks we might and ought to perform ourselves.

Jesus is now before Herod Antipas, that savage man, who had killed John the Baptist. John had fearlessly hurled Herod's ugly crimes full in that flabby, sneering face. It might mean death (in fact it did), but the incensed preacher must have his say.

But the case is altered now. For John, then, silence would have been cowardice; for Jesus, now, it was dignity: He could best repudiate this cynical fox by completely ignoring his frivolous demands. Jesus was not taking refuge in lofty or frigid aloofness. This was not the silence of arrogance. It was a bold refusal to be a plaything for this curious charlatan. The guileless Galilean Prophet would not march to the music of the lewd Galilean dandy. Herod got nowhere with Jesus.

Back to Pilate Jesus comes.

To the governor this was highly discommoding, bitterly disconcerting. He had considered his decision to send Jesus to the king a double stroke of diplomacy. It would, he thought, conciliate Herod, with whom he was on unfriendly terms; and in this he was right, for Herod and Pilate became friends again that very day; and it would deliver him from the dangerous *impasse* into which he had been driven. But his stratagem had not worked. Poor Pilate is in a worse quandry now than ever. He wants to free Jesus and satisfy his sense of justice, yet he wants to condemn Him to gratify the rabble. He must do one or the other soon; he cannot run with the hares and hunt with the hounds much longer. Which shall it be? He oscillates between Christ and the crowd.

5. Pilot's Wife

At this critical moment the governor gets a communication from his wife.

Women have ever been the counselors, refiners, and saviours of men. In all ages they have stood, like guardian angels, by the side of men, immersed in the baffling problems of the world, liable to be coarsened or ruined by it, to point them to the nobler ways and the higher laws of the unseen powers.

Pilate's wife (tradition says her name was Claudia Procula) was a woman of discernment, good judgment, and tender, sensitive spirit; one of those "whose names adorn the pristine annals of her race."

But the refined Procula was sharing the life of the coarse, weak Pilate. It was the mating of the gazelle and the dog. She had known him when he was strong and honorable, but she had seen him become weak and dishonorable. She had watched for his rise to true greatness, but instead had been compelled to witness his moral degradation. There were moments in which she thought she still detected beneath pride's hard surface, a fleeting image of the other Pilate she had known in younger years, but when she sought to hold it and prolong its presence, it was gone. He had come to be a coarse, cruel, murderous man—hardened by the problems of world—contemptuous of virtue, irreverent, skeptical, callous. Procula had been God's best gift to Pilate but he had neither valued nor heeded her. How different things might have been if he had!

Pilate's wife could not have known Jesus personally, yet how could she escape knowing *of* Him? His preaching and parables and deeds filled the air. From what she had heard and *seen* (she was in Jerusalem now and had witnessed His trial thus far) she was convinced that Jesus was innocent. By unerring intuition based upon a record of good report, and a dream which she had concerning Him on the very morning of the trial, she concluded that He was both an innocent and unusual Man. She sent to her husband saying pleadingly, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things in a dream this day because of him."

Pilate was a pagan, sinful man, but God lets no man slip into moral ruin without some glints of light to stay and guide his soul. Procula's warning was a merciful premonition—a beacon in the darkness, pointing the way to this stranded, all but shipwrecked man,—but he did not heed. The hour of testing had found him an impotent coward.

Though this good woman's effort to save Jesus, and her husband, failed, yet her courageous, costly act of moral intervention entitles her to a place on the roll of the world's great women.

6. Jesus or Barabbas?

To this man morally marooned in the marshes of evil, a hand had been thrust out to help; but it had been refused. Now there is another hand pushing him downward, deeper and ever deeper.

But another idea crossed Pilate's mind.

This was the Passover of the Jews. At this annual feast it was their custom to set some notorious prisoner free. Pilate leaped at the thought. He would propose Jesus as that one. He would chastise then release Him. As Stalker has remarked, he would inflict the severe punishment as a sop to the people's rage, and then release Him as a tribute to justice. But what an injustice to Jesus! What frenzied devotion to the Roman god of expediency! It was an act of shameless brutality. Pilate is fast resigning himself to the caprice of the rabble. Poor, pussyfooting, pliable Pilate! See him wriggle and try to avoid making a decision! Munkacsy's *Christ Before Pilate* is a masterly study in art of the troubled governor. Look at that face, strong, but now so "miserably full of indecision"! In a way he hears the arguments advanced, but his mind is busy worming its way through the dire possibilities, prodding a method of personal escape from this *cul de sac.*

But what had looked like a loophole of escape for the harried judge was a noose into which he had thrust his head. His plan to release Jesus miserably miscarried. The garrulous priests and priest-ridden rabble hissed at the suggestion; they gave vent to their powerful disapproval in the most vicious and vociferous vituperations yet uttered. Against the governor they thundered derision and defiance; they heaped maledictions upon his head. Pilate sought for milder measures, but they, firm and inflexible, refused to cede an iota.

They had a notorious robber whose name, strange to say, was also Jesus—Jesus Barabbas. Pilate sets these two Jesuses before the people. What a sight it must have been! The one a bandit, a desperado, stained with blood; the Other the Friend of mankind, the Great Teacher, and Doer of good. "Now which will you have?" says Pilate, "Jesus Barabbas or Jesus Christ?" A mighty chorus of voices shouted *"Barabbas!"*

Pilate is puzzled to the point of madness. He has the bearing of an arch gambler who has played everything on one stake and lost. The cold apathy which ruled him early in the trial is gone; grave apprehension reigns. Pilate is sober at last. Seriousness is written upon his brow. The contour of his countenance is a tell-tale of a troubled spirit within. His face takes on a sepulchral hue. He stares, pale and passively, first at Jesus, then at the crowd. Jesus stands clothed with sinister dignity, calm as the unruffled sea; Pilate stands the image of awful discomfiture, stricken into white dumbness. In this tournament of tigers it is plain that he is losing; has lost. These priests are his masters now; though not a gullible man, he has been tricked by their craft; they have defeated his last stratagem. A flood of anger mounts within him—anger at the Jews, anger at the inevitable. He is a victim of dread, is insolent, morose, bovine. He had been as sleek and treacherous as a cat, a skilled intriguer; now he sees himself the victim of a huge network of intrigues.

Release Barabbas? What shall he do with Jesus? That is the question which drives him mad. He had washed his hands, indeed, when he ought to have exerted them; they are blood-stained now, and blood does not easily come off.

The final shot which felled the trembling governor was a word flung from the rabble containing a winged and envenomed dart which went straight to its mark. Someone cried, "If thou let this man go, thou are not Caesar's friend!" Pilate was guilty of crimes, which if known to Tiberius, might easily cost him his position, if not his head. If he released Jesus, the

Jews would get revenge by telling on him. He did not dare. The ghost of his past misdoings reared itself spectre-like and frightened him out of doing the fine thing he wished to do. *A man can do wrong until he cannot do right.*

> “Our acts follow us from afar,
> And what we have been makes us what we are.”

Pilate had been curt, cruel, and domineering with the Jews, headstrong and hectoring. Once already their protest had won the emperor’s ear and the governor had been humbled. It must not happen again. And so now his unwilling hands will send Christ to the cross; unwilling—but they will do it. Is it strange that his name has gone down in history to be “pelted with the infamy of every race”? Life is a fearsome thing, and sin is merciless. You cannot sip its sweets without in the end quaffing to the full its bitter dregs as well.

And so, as Dean Inge has said with tartness and truth, mankind has too frequently honored its destroyers and persecuted its benefactors, building palaces for living brigands and for its prophets tombs.

> “The saints and seers and prophets of the race,
> Who called to farther goals and led the way.
> We carve from dull dead stone their travesties,
> We cover them with incense and great praise—
> In any way to keep them from our hearts;
> In any way to keep from following after
> On that stern path that leads at last to peace!” [1]

The world goes on choosing between Christ and Barabbas.

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[1] *The Christian Century,* Chicago.

7. Ecce Homo

"What is truth?" said Pilate, smugly, but not without concern, early in the trial. Till then he had smiled at religion. To him Jesus was no king, only a harmless dreamer; He was no son of God, only a child of superstition, more fit to be pitied than adored. "Art thou a king?" "What is truth?" "Whence art thou?" It is the sad, sour, cynical voice of the skeptic rising out of the moral morass of decadent Rome, which rings in these questions. Pilate was the product of a heartless materialism which had spread miasma-like over the world, leaving moral inertness everywhere. Men had lost faith in goodness and God. What was the use talking about so impractical a thing as truth? It was an age of spiritual torpor, and Pilate had joined the sham-smashers of the day. He was a kind of First Century hokum-hunter—sardonic, secular, iconoclastic.

Jesus was stripped; once more scourged, and led forth by Pilate, who said, *"Behold the Man!"*

"O Sacred Head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down;
Now scornfully surrounded
With thorns, thine only crown."

At the thorn-crowned Jesus, still claiming to be a king, Pilate doubtless chuckled. But, if so, the jesting mood soon passed again. He now felt this to be the most ominous hour of his life. We read that he was much afraid now. "A dreadful presentiment" was taking shape in his mind. This haggard Man stood there crowned with thorns, robed in purple, an awesome sight. Someone had said, He claimed to be the Son of God. Pilate's native superstition made him uneasy. What if he had been guilty of scourging a son of the gods? His countenance was ashen; he quaked with fear; he was perturbation itself. All Jerusalem was aquiver with rage; Jesus alone was serene. Pilate marveled. Before that gaunt, bleeding Figure he stood frozen, staring into those understanding eyes—eyes, they were, unclouded by craft, undimmed by passion—eyes which were homes of prayer, harbingers of an unearthly charm—eyes, which, though compelled to witness colossal sordidness, yet held no resentment—eyes so clear that they caused the governor to wince and feel dirty. Oh, the wizardry of this Man! No wonder Pilate was afraid. His fate is lurking in this affair. He is affected with the sense of calamity. His chickens have come home to roost with a vengeance. He rummages his brain in search of a way out: there is none: he is enmeshed in the vast intricacies of the webs of fate.

8. Victory or Defeat?

"What shall I do with Jesus?" had been Pilate's question all along; it is his final question now. And up from the carpet of frenzied faces thundered simultaneous shouts: *"Crucify him! Crucify him!"* "But your king," said Pilate, in mockery and utter disgust, "shall I crucify your king?" "We have no king but Caesar," they retorted, and kept yelling, "Crucify! Crucify!" until he signed the death warrant of Jesus and set Barabbas free. Strange paradox this! One of our poets puts it tersely:

"The rabble cried: 'Away with him and all his kind;
Deliver unto us Barabbas.' Thus the blind
Forever mock and crucify the ones who see;
The ones who propagate their blindness, them they free!"

The resolute will of the priests working on Pilate's irresolution had beaten down the governor's last scruple, and extorted from him the fatal order.

That was a moment big with decision; a destiny-making moment. The fate of a nation hung in the balance; the destiny of millions was being sealed. Even now a wave of revulsion rushes over one in recounting the gruesome story. Jesus was dying a Victim of the savage politics of the Temple and the Empire.

From the Praetorium our Saviour goes bearing His cross down the sorrowful *Via Dolorosa* to Golgotha. Here on the Hill of the Skull He died. It was at once the supreme crime and the supreme achievement of the ages. Evil men had encompassed His death, but in that death was sounded the death knell of every fortified villainy of the earth.

Pilate sentenced Jesus to save himself, but of course he did not save himself. A novelist pictures him reading his Plato an hour after the trial, forgetful of, or trying to forget, the sordid affair; but if Pilate forgot what he had done, Nemesis did not. Pilate's end is shrouded in uncertainty, but history informs us that one calamity after another befell him until his death. For his crimes he was recalled, imprisoned, and was awaiting execution by the Emperor Caligula, but forestalled this by committing suicide. All that he feared would happen if he freed Jesus, happened anyhow. As for the Jews, who said, "his blood be on us," the immediate years found them a crushed and fallen people. To this day they are a nation of wanderers.

St. Paul's saying, "We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth," was never better illustrated or vindicated than by the career of Pontius Pilate. Then, as is so often true in life, those who conquered did not win, nor those receive the gain.

It is an old question; but who was on trial that day—Jesus Christ or Pilate and the Jews?

"Speak, History! Who are life's victors? Unroll thy long annals and say.
Are they those whom the world called victors, who won the success of the day?
The martyrs of Nero? The Spartans who fell at Thermopylae's tryst,
Or the Persians and Xerxes? His judges or Socrates? Pilate?—or Christ?"

CHAPTER IX

MATTHEW: FROM JEWISH OUTCAST TO CHRISTIAN APOSTLE

"Matthew the publican."—Matthew 10:3.

"As Jesus passed forth from thence He saw a man named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and He saith unto him, Follow me."—Matthew 9:9.

1. The Publicans

It has been pointed out that Matthew is the only biographer of Jesus who puts into his book the phrase, "Matthew the publican." He only of the four gospel writers, sets down the contemptible word. Mark, Luke, and John all knew that Matthew had been a publican before he became an apostle; it was the truth, but a truth, they thought, which it was just as well never to utter. Anyhow, had Matthew not changed? Had he not completely reformed? Why keep alive a regrettable past? Why not let bygones be bygones? It seemed fitting to them to make no mention of it in their books. Why, then, does Matthew use it? Of all men he should be the last to blazon the disparaging title after his name. Why did he not omit it? Could it possibly help in any way? Rather would it not be a needless offence, a grave handicap which might well be dispensed with? "Matthew the publican!"—and his name need never have come down to us in that ugly form had it not been for Matthew himself.

There was no reason why the hated profession of Matthew should be mentioned except to magnify the grace of God in his conversion to Christ. We should never have known that a despised publican had been made an apostle had not Matthew expressly told us so. But then we should not have known, either, the story of a marvelous conversion.

Then, too, it is one more example of the cutting candor of the Bible; but it is more than an exhibition of candor; it is a way that this erstwhile sinner has of confessing the ignoble life he had lived, a way of witnessing to his complete transformation by Jesus. It is an expression much like Paul's oft-reiterated "Cross of Christ" as the height of his glorying. In that day the cross was the instrument of torture and shame, and except for Christ's relation to it, and His transformation of it from the instrument of disgrace to the emblem of redemption and victory, for any to have identified himself with it, as Paul did, would have been the quickest way to heap disgrace upon himself. But Paul gloried in the cross and he with the first apostles made it the conquering symbol of the Church of Christ. But this could never have been had not Christ died on the cross, transforming it from an instrument of death and defeat to a throne from which He rules as spiritual Monarch of the world. So Matthew, but for his transformation by Christ, would never have set down the degrading title "publican" after his name.

Beside using it as a kind of perennial confession which he wanted to make to the world, he doubtless thought it would encourage other publicans to aspire higher.

Now who were the publicans?

They were Jews employed as agents of Rome to collect the taxes for the Government. It was their business, by any means, fair or foul, mostly foul, to farm the taxes out of the people. Not a very popular calling in any day or country, and least of all in Jesus' day when Rome ruled the land. Here is the way it was done. Some man would pay the Roman Government a fixed sum for the right to collect the taxes in a given district. Then he took all he could get. Like some get-rich-quick business methods of today, there was every chance to be dishonest and defraud. And the publicans did it. The publicans were men of means, and their lucrative business was protected by the alien conquerors whose hated agents they were. They were considered traitors to their country. To the true Jew his country and his soul were practically identical; the nation and the individual were one. A Jew should, therefore, live for his country. But the publican lived for himself at the expense of his country. "He had not only accepted without a blush the dominion of the stranger; he had taken part with the stranger in his dominion!" Jesus in befriending the publicans appeared to countenance their disloyalty, and this was precisely why the rulers so hated Him.

Being considered unpatriotic to their country, the publicans were objects of detestation, very obnoxious. They were outcasts from Jewish society. They were denied the right to serve as witnesses in court; not counted as citizens. They were barred from the synagogue; excluded from all religious fellowship. They were not allowed to contribute to the support of the Temple. They were ostracized, cut off from the faith of the fathers; they were religious outcasts, social lepers. They were rated as the scum of the earth, which not infrequently they were. To the great mass of the people, then, the "telones" or tax-gatherers, were those who had sold their country, their religion, their soul for gold. They were sinners well nigh beyond redemption. Every time a religious Jew saw a publican he was reminded afresh of his hateful bondage to Rome. The publican aided in keeping the galling yoke on their necks. He was a libertine who had bartered his self-respect to fatten off the taxes of his fellow-Jews. They were licensed robbers, hard-faced extortioners all. It was next to impossible for a publican to be an honest man. "An honest tax-gatherer was almost a contradiction in terms." They were the pariahs in Israel. The more the tax-collector extorted the quicker he got rich. By this method Zacchaeus became the "chief of the publicans."

Matthew was a tax-collector for Herod Antipas in Galilee. He was a product of the teeming life of the Galilee of Jesus' day. The Jewish historian, Josephus, tells us that there were in Galilee two hundred and four cities and villages of fifteen thousand inhabitants and over. Galilee was the most fertile, populous and prosperous part of the Holy Land; the scene of a busy, bustling, wealthy life in the Master's day. The shore of the famous lake there, now bare as a rock and hushed and vacant, was once the scene of the Master's ministry. Capernaum was the thriving center of political and commercial life of the day. Down this shore through Capernaum ran the Roman caravan-route from Damascus to

Egypt and the Mediterranean. At Capernaum, on this same road, was the Roman customs house, where Matthew collected the Government revenues, and from which post Jesus invited him to become His disciple.

Personally Matthew seems to have been a man of quiet magnetism and spiritual charm, a man of modest demeanor, of rare urbanity. His was not as colorful a career as some, but what he did he did with a deftness which lent distinction to his acts.

2. Matthew's Conversion

The ninth chapter of Matthew's Gospel is the only record we have of a complete day's work of Jesus, and Matthew the publican figures grandly in that busy day. This was the day Jesus challenged him to a new life, and this the day when Matthew accepted the challenge.

He had been, let us suppose, on his way to business that morning and had stopped long enough to watch Jesus heal a man of the palsy. Since he and Jesus were fellow-townsmen they had seen and probably known each other for some time. The publican had doubtless heard Jesus preach on several occasions. The great Rabbi was beginning to make a strong tug at the heart of the village tax-collector. But being a man of business he could not wait, but hurried on and was soon engrossed in the ponderous rolls of the revenue office. But before the day ended Jesus passed along and said, "Matthew, I want you."

The gospel writers give no hint of any previous acquaintance which would prepare Matthew to respond to the invitation of Jesus; they deal only with the crisis of his conversion. But the fact that Capernaum was now the home of Jesus as well as the location of Matthew's business makes it certain that he knew considerable about Jesus before the invitation was given. He was an outcast from the synagogue, but we may be sure he had heard Jesus preach on the shore of his native lake, in the field, or on the streets of his city. More than once Matthew had stood on the outskirts of the crowd and listened to Jesus preach. Quite probably He had preached on the nearby street corner where Matthew could hear from his booth. In one way or another Matthew had heard the stirring things Jesus was saying. Some of these got themselves planted in the subconscious mind of the publican and haunted him. Was one of these that unforgettable word to money-hungry men hot in pursuit of wealth: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Or, perchance, it was this: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Every time Matthew heard the burning words of the new Teacher he secretly hated himself. Every time Jesus walked by the tax office Matthew's conscience stung him. For days in his business booth at Capernaum-on-the-lake this publican had sat thinking—thinking of the radical change he would undergo if he should ally himself with the new Teacher. What would he do if Jesus should dare him, as He had dared others recently on the shore of that same lake, to become His disciple? He did not know. He was full of indecision, unusually befuddled, if not addled. An awful indecision rages within, "a tempest in a skull."

But here comes the Rabbi now. He, with His disciples and the throng who have been attracted to Him this day because of His preaching and miracles are moving along the street toward Matthew's booth.

Jesus came to where Matthew was and stopped, looking fixedly at him. The publican felt that He was looking *through* him. The narrative says arrestingly, "Jesus *saw* Matthew." The soul of the tax-collector was now naked before the all-penetrating eye of the Master of men. Matthew felt that for the first time in his daring history that he had been *seen,* understood. In that moment Jesus, the Master Psychologist, knew what Matthew would do, He saw the spiritual machinery doing its wonderful work and divined the beautiful response this ostracized sinner was about to make to His proffered love and confidence. As Jesus looked Matthew melted within just as Peter melted under that penetrating, pitying eye on a memorable night later. It was too much for him. No longer could he resist that pleading eye. The "Hound of Heaven" stood peering into the depths of the soul of His victim. "Matthew," He said softly, "quit fighting against God; quit stifling your best and highest aspirations; come, and I will give you peace; follow me!"

Jesus sees men as they really are, or may be; we do not. Men said Matthew was a bad man, a vicious, a despicable character; but Jesus, looking beneath a hard exterior which a merciless religion and an unpitying society had made, saw the native tenderness of his heart, the greatness of his nature; He saw the beauty of his character, the strength of his unawakened intellect, the fine loyalty that could be stirred in that imprisoned soul. He saw in this publican the huge possibilities for good that His touch might release for service in the Kingdom.

Matthew felt a qualm at the audacity of this Teacher, but knew he must, somehow, heed Him. He did so with no compunction whatever, and apparently without delay. The Master's challenge brought him to a moment of agonizing indecision. Half prodigal, half idealist, one part of him hotly warred against the other, but the idealist in him gained the victory: "And he arose and followed Him."

To be sure, as a youth, Matthew had had those sunny visions and gallant dreams so characteristic of youth, but they had well-nigh perished. What had been the golden ideals of the young man had become submerged in the mature man's money-madness. The good-natured publican had been buffeted by the self-righteous one-hundred-per-centers of the day until he had grown hard, defiant, and quite contemptuous of all religion. Then, too, Matthew had suffered the misfortune of many in all ages: he had been stung by the adder of the commonplace; he had been too long content to live beneath his capacity; he had come to rest in a dangerous and stultifying peace, and peace is for the dead, not the living. But Jesus had awakened the sleeping angel that was Matthew. He had filled him not only with brightest hopes, but with "a large and liberal discontent" which is the very sign of growth, the pledge of all achievement.

It was a great venture of faith, a radical thing for Jesus to call such a man as Matthew to be an apostle. It was to fling all the maxims of expediency and worldly wisdom to the wind. It was to fly in the face of popular prejudice and religious sanction. Publicans were suspected and hated by all. In the common talk of the day their names were linked with the basest of profligates. "Publicans and sinners," "publicans and harlots," "heathen and publicans," "assassins, robbers and publicans" were all common phrases of the rabbis and the people, full of stinging reproach, and hurled in infinite contempt at these vile ones. It was indeed a radical thing for Jesus to call such a man; but, as has been said, "Out of noble dissent have come all the world's betterments and redemptions."

But Jesus did a still more radical thing: when Matthew invited Him to a feast in his home, "He sat down," we are told, "and ate with many publicans and sinners." This stirred the social centers of Capernaum, and enraged the temple ecclesiastics at Jerusalem. From that moment the Master was sneeringly dubbed "the friend of publicans and sinners," a title which to their great amazement He gladly accepted. He championed their cause and chivalrously defended them against the cold, suspicious and censorious goodness which only provoked them to sullen defiance. He was a Physician with no time to waste on proud, satisfied people quite convinced of their own wholeness. His place was among the broken. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

"This was the reason," says J. A. Robertson in his *Spiritual Pilgrimage of Jesus,* "why they welcomed Him, coveted His company. He belonged to a world far above them; yet—somehow—because of this unconquerable faith of His in human nature, it became easy for them to rise above themselves. When they thought of their own hopelessness, the degrading bondage of the passions into which they had sold themselves, they must often have wondered if He really knew. But when they stood in His presence and looked into His eyes, they knew that He knew. And still He believed. It was strange! And they found themselves waking up into new life in His presence, with singing and laughter—and tears. Unaccountable tears!" Here was One who by the grandeur of His soul, who by His sheer humanness and sympathy won their hearts, One who did not ignore or evade their shame, but overcame it with goodness.

Thus Jesus had succeeded in calling out the best there was in Matthew. He has been calling out the best there is locked up in men and women ever since. Jesus had awakened all the slumbering greatness of this publican, had stung him to all those unresting labors for the Kingdom of God to which he gave himself in subsequent years. Never again was Matthew's skilful pen put to an unworthy use. Never again was he content with ease and smallness. Tradition has it that he died preaching the gospel in Persia.

Before the soul can do any big responding, it must have something to respond to. Matthew had seen nothing in the dry, defunct religion of the rabbis to respond to, but Jesus kindled him; the divine spark touched his lifeless clod, and the clod became a stone which flashed fire.

"So Matthew left the golden gains,
At the great Master's call;
His soul the love of Christ constrains
Freely to give up all.

"O Saviour! when prosperity
Makes this world hard to leave
And all the pomps and vanity
Their meshes round us weave:

"Oh grant us grace that to thy call
We may obedient be;
And cheerfully forsaking all,
May follow only thee."

Matthew was more than a practical business man. He had a solemn, brooding mind, a promising face. The face of the common run tax-collector was sordid and vacant, but not Matthew's. Here was a different sort of tax-collector. He was disgraced, but not degenerate. Here was a man whom Jesus could make into a sweet mystic, for all his practical turn of mind. This dapper young Jew is now thrown into company with Peter the impulsive, with Thomas the dubious, and with John, a young man of dreams and fire. These influences will permeate his life like a blessed contagion, and coalesce in his character. This high-souled publican is destined to become a cardinal apostle. In some ways he was the greatest convert of Jesus. He was the best scholar among the Twelve.

It was quickly rumored that Jesus had asked Matthew to become His disciple. From that day onward the Pharisees watched Him with the narrowed eyes of cats. For His attention to these social outcasts, Caiaphas, the high priest, cold and deadly as a snake, stealthy and cunning as a cat, eyed Him constantly. So did all the Pharisees. These spreading defenders of an outworn creed, always vocative—and hence to Jesus very provocative—about their rigid but inhuman scruples, watched Him with a vicious joy one can sometimes know in having his dear prejudice satisfied. They had predicted that the incorrigible Rabbi would be hobnobbing with the debauched publicans yet. When later they tracked the "gluttonous winebibber" to the banquet hall of the "bums," they clapped their hands in fiendish glee and said, "We told you so!"

Matthew was far from being docile or easily taken in, but he had been unable to resist longer the fascination of this whimsical Teacher. Very promptly he closed out his lucrative business, dissolved partnership with brother publicans, and joined the Galilean's company. It was a radical change of business for Matthew, but he survived the shock gloriously.

This publican's response to the call of Jesus was complete. Till then he had been living only for the world's poor prizes. Till then he had not seen how shabby he was living. Till then he had been content to live in the fogs and bogs of life. But Jesus had set his soul climbing eagerly toward the white heights. As Matheson says, "So novel was the experience that it carried him away. Surprise overmastered him. That Christ should choose *him*—the cipher, the nobody, the man who had forfeited his right to call himself a son of Israel—this was a startling thing. That he, who had never been dignified enough to care what the world might think of him, should be suddenly called to stand before the world as an example, was a thought almost weird in its strangeness. The newness of the sensation quite conquered him. 'Follow me!' said the voice; and he lingered not a moment."[1]

[1] *Representative Men of the New Testament,* page 190.

He had been suddenly shaken out of the stupor of contentment with little ways. Jesus had awakened his slumbering vision, and he would follow the audacious vision wherever it led. Life for him quickly became a thing big and spacious and vastly nobler than he had ever dreamed it could be. It does for anyone when Jesus shows him how to use it. For the first time Matthew saw that life need not be sordid or dull; Christ could make it glorious, a thing of supreme worth. Aye, many of us have found it so!

Once Matthew had met Christ, he could no longer find an excuse for living shabbily. Who can? To live shabbily with Christ on hand to help is suicidal. George Matheson calls Matthew "the man who had no mirror"; one who had lost the power to see himself. He had lost the sense of his own importance. He had no longer an aim in life, either high or low. He had sunk into a sad state of spiritual coma. Dreams he had had once, but there had crept into his soul a satiety, a boredom, an ennui and a self-loathing which is pathetic and deadly. But Christ has changed all that.

All Matthew needed to lift him out of the stupor of sin and small living was someone to believe in him. Nobody believed any good of a publican—nobody but Jesus. He saw rich possibilities where others saw none. He had the capacity to see the ripe fruit in the green apple. He saw unsuspected gallantries in commonplace men. He saw brave souls and kindly spirits hidden away behind unprepossessing faces and rough exteriors. The Pharisees saw nothing of worth in Matthew. In fact, the man deemed himself of little account. He had sold himself for money. It is remarkable that Jesus should have discovered an apostle hidden away in such a man. Michael Angelo stood one day looking at some rude, rough blocks of stone. His artist's eye could see possibilities which others could not see. "What are you looking at?" they asked him as he gazed fixedly at the rude lump. "An angel," he replied. And the angel was there imprisoned in the cold, dead, unshapely stone until the cunning fingers of the sculptor liberated it. So to the unseeing world of Jesus' day, Matthew and the publicans were but unpromising riff-raff; but they were to Jesus full of potential goodness and greatness. So Christ looked at Matthew; so He looks at each of us. He does not judge men by their vices so much as by their potential virtues.

Recall Jean Valjean, the hero of Hugo's dramatic novel, and the good Bishop from whom he stole the silverware. The Bishop was the first to discover any good in the poor, hounded, crime-ridden galley slave, which thing finally transformed Jean into a beloved benefactor of his fellow kind. So, Jesus discovers Matthew. Indeed, the old Matthew is gone; a new man lives in the old body once tenanted by Matthew. And just as Valjean's one motive ever after was to so live that he might win the Bishop's approval, so Matthew labored to win the approval of Christ.

Now none saw more clearly than Jesus the seamy side of life, but He refused to believe, as our modern cynics who style themselves realists profess to, that life has only a seamy side. Christ was amazed that men could see so little in life, that they could toss it away for such dusty nothings, some of them. He had come that they might have life, not that poor scummy thing we mistakenly call life, but real life, big and clean, growing fairer and richer every day. He believed in men so much that straightway they came to have a strange new confidence in themselves. Men looked at Jesus, felt His sympathy and greatness and were reminded of undreamed-of powers within themselves; "dried spirits revived, buried hopes sprang to life at His coming."

And is not this the saving thing about the Cross of Christ? What is the Atonement but Christ displaying His vast faith in men to the point of dying for them, thus compelling men to rise in their native gallantry to meet this amazing demonstration of His faith in them? Jesus has an obstinate faith in us which seems, on the whole, to be little justified, but in spite of huge impotency and unfaithfulness on our part, He never loses faith in us. Christ's faith in men is nothing short of staggering. Calvary is the supreme proof of that.

Just because of His vast faith in men He dared to ask big things of them. Says Arthur John Gossip, "Always Christ asks these vast things with a quiet confidence that has no fear of refusal." He is so sure that we will not fail Him. How He trusts us! This causes men to believe in themselves, without which they are doomed to failure. Matthew came to believe in himself because One so great as Jesus dared to believe in him. Matthew was charmed by Jesus. Here was an unfettered and free Spirit, Himself emancipated, and bespeaking like liberty for all. He had broken with the neat little waxy ideas and customs of His creed-hampered age. He was an untrammelled soul. Henceforth they were inseparable friends, Matthew and Jesus.

3. The Feast of Sinners

Matthew proved the genuineness of his conversion as much by what he immediately set about doing as by what he quit doing. He left the dishonest tax-booth, breaking completely with the old disreputable life. He wanted to do something for Jesus. The first thing he could think of was to make a feast in His honor. He would invite all his fellow-publicans and introduce them to his new-found Master.

But would Jesus come? Matthew must have wondered. Was His interest in publican outcasts as great as it seemed, or was He just another rabbi? He could not think so. Would He fly in the face of public opinion and come to his feast? Well, he would see.

Jesus came too gladly. Luke's account has it, "And Levi (Matthew) made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and others that sat down with them." It was a feast in honor of Jesus, but more than that, it was Matthew's Emancipation Proclamation, his farewell to his publican career and friends.

But Matthew's chief design was to acquaint brother publicans with Christ. This was the evening of the very day of his conversion. Already he was becoming "a fisher of men." With the zeal characteristic of a young disciple he would induce others to take the same step he had taken. Says Dr. Whyte, "They had all supped with Matthew before, but that was the first night for many years that a man with any good name to lose had broken bread at the publican's table."

What a blow at class and caste! What sweeping disregard of high religious sanctions! Here, too, is the whole problem of class distinction. The difference between class and class is not determined by living conditions and material things, poverty or wealth, social standing or the lack of it, but by the opinion men have of themselves. A man may swear equality, loudly assert his rights, fight for recognition, but if he feels inferior, no standing he has (or the lack of it), no thing he possesses can cure him of the ignoble complex. The sense of inferiority is inexcusable in a respectable person. This was the sad thing about these publicans: they had been disrespected until they had come to disrespect themselves. And this Jesus altered.

4. The Pharisees

But the Pharisees were also at the feast. As was to be expected, these self-appointed guardians of a dead legalistic formula came sniffing at Jesus' trail. These buxom rabbis, sponsors of an effete religion, snarled and were offended. They were rightly alarmed to see Jesus chumming with publicans. It meant death to their priviliged monopolies in religion. They wheezed and sniffed, looking at Him with truculent eyes; they shook their futile fists. Their dull toad's eyes rested menacingly upon Him. With sullen rage from the fringe of the crowd they glared at Him and the motly company gathered there. What was the world coming to? It was a tense time. These evil-eyed spyers-out, devotees of a phantom faith, were scandalized. They growled in blind and furious anger. They had made their first complaint against the Master earlier in the day when He assumed the rôle of divinity in healing a paralytic. He had said, "thy sins are forgiven thee." At this their mutterings were not unlike the ominous twanging of bowstrings taut and ready to let fly the deadly arrow. Or, to change the figure, they were like coiled serpents, their gleaming eyes giving promise of their baleful intent. They were narrow-minded pedants, unprincipled coxcombs, place-hunters, all. Hardening into unerring fixity of aim, they began their unsleeping enterprise set for the accomplishing of one thing—the silencing of this Man. For they were shrewd enough to see that the success of His principles was lessening their grip on the people; already theirs was a diminishing splendor; they saw their star beginning to set.

The forms, more than the spirit, of their institution had been made sacrosanct by the touch of time on them, and woe to any man who dared subvert or change them. Jesus had a way of reaching through time-worn conventions to their living heart. That they were motivated by a terrible loyalty is quite true, for patriotism and religion, as Dr. Atkins has said, "were drawing perilously near to each other in the time of Christ"; and yet self-interest never went masquerading as high devotion to the degree that it did in these Jewish priests.

Their presence at the banquet indicates how deeply they had been stirred by the strange events of the day. The people were saying, "We have seen strange things today!" "We never saw anything like this before!" They were wondering what shocking thing this Rabbi would do next. They stared at Jesus with eyes like sharp knives. They were ready to argue with stones and gibes; but as yet they had not ventured an open rupture with Him, content to vent their ill-humor on the disciples. To them, with envy in their hearts and sanctimony on their lips, they broke in when they could refrain no longer, "Why does your master eat with publicans and sinners?" "This man receiveth sinners and *eateth* with them."

In the East to dine with one is a pledge of friendship. Jesus was *eating* with publicans. Well did they know what this meant. It was evident that He was a friend of these shameless traitors. Yet, said they, He claims to be our Messiah! Pooh! Pooh! they sneered and were horrified. They raised shocked eyes to heaven as if calling God to witness the unseemly violations of their venerable tenets by the upstart Teacher whose magic name was already filling the land. His high claims were now to be treated as blasphemy, and just so much buffoonery. They hooted and hissed through scorn-twisted lips. From this day on they regarded Jesus with savage animosity. To them He was a sacriligeous innovator. It was the forging of the first stout link in the long chain of underworld treason which two years hence would bind Him in death. Why was their new Teacher so friendly to the common riff-raff of all the towns; these too-much-respected thugs, these conscienceless agents of mammon, these enemies of Jewish patriotism and religion? Why?

That Jesus preached to these sinners gathered in Matthew's house there can be little doubt. What did He say?

We have a part of the sermon He preached that night, it would seem, in the fifteenth chapter of Luke: those three powerful parables on lost things: the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son. The chapter is prefaced with the words, "Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners to hear Him. And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured." Where else would Jesus be likely to have in His audience *all* the publicans and sinners as at Matthew's feast of publicans? And what could be so appropriate for this congregation of prodigals as the matchless parable of the Prodigal Son?

One can imagine the Pharisees listening for a little to the Master, charmed as snakes are charmed by the piping of a lute; and that they stood still, their faces beaming like hawks' faces, cold and reticent; that presently the fire leaped from their eyes, and that powerful swellings, till now held in, burst out; that they hissed like envious geese at the intrusion of a stranger; that they gave low raspy growls like frogs deep in the cold, clammy mud as they sneered contemptuously—"*A gluttonous man, a friend of sinners!*"

It is certain that these shrivel-souled, pig-snouted men, forever parading their superior merits, evermore hymning their own praise to the discredit of others, were at the feast that night for just one purpose—to detract from, diminish, and damage the growing reputation of the entrancing Teacher, and thereby shield and safeguard their own. It was the beginning of their inspection tour—their campaign of indecent round-eyed intrusion upon Jesus which was not to cease until His fate should be accomplished. Into that house of feasting and fellowship they had come unbidden, and in their familiar peacock strut, to point out in public a gross irregularity in Jesus.

Hating Him while uttering a welcome, they come calling Him "Master." They wear faces in which pride peers from behind a mask of humility. Will He utter another diatribe against those who sit in Moses' seat? They think it better to probe Him in conversation, finding a weak spot, before venturing an open assault. With a sour expression they look into the prophet's eyes, now blazing in angry earnestness, and ask Him why He disregards the traditions of the fathers. He answers them bitingly, and His shafts strike home; but when they strike back, their vengeful thrust will slay Him; for behind the scenes the powers are combining to crush the troublesome visionary. The disciples get a presage of His imminent death.

In reply to the charges of these sanctimonious fault-finders Jesus said frankly, "I came to seek and to save that which was lost." He admitted that His mission was "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." There was brusqueness in His tones which left them bitter, full of battle and calumny as He went on: "I came not" (this, with manifest irony) "to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." At this they must have quavered fiercely, their eyes flashing malevolence toward Him. There was sarcasm in His voice as He added, "They that are well need not a physician, but they that are sick," (especially they that know they are sick as somehow the publicans did. Witness the humble manner of that one in the Temple who smote his breast and prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner.")

At His words they stiffened into silence and slunk off from the feast to bide their time. They were waggish, and went forth to wag their tongues against Jesus; and the tongues of cheap people, to say nothing of those who are influential, can be as poisonous as vipers' fangs. And theirs were. They gradually biased public opinion against Him which by and by ended in His death on the cross. Even now they were like cobras, fiercely fanged, reared and ready to strike, so venomous did they feel; but they dared not as yet. All publicans they eschewed; this turncoat publican—this publican become a Christian—they loathed. But doubtless Matthew sat there that night, high-minded, tragic-eyed, his face beaming a wondrous peace; while Jesus stood haggard, deep-eyed, regretful at the gathering storm, but clothed with surprising dignity. As the Pharisees went out they may have laughed a throaty, cynical laugh, but if they did, there was under their laugh a huge discomfort. Jesus has outraged convention. They went about henceforth pronouncing fierce philippics against Him.

5. Matthew's Monument

Of the life and labors of this apostle we know next to nothing. There is little mention of his activities in the Record. He seems never to have been a conspicuous leader among the Twelve. But he made his mighty contribution to the cause of Christ. He preserved His teachings in a great book and passed them on to the ages.

To be able to give the world a great book is a sufficient monument to any man. Matthew did that. The book which stands first in our New Testament is "The Gospel According to Matthew," a book which has helped to shape the spiritual destiny of countless millions. Thanks to this publican whom Jesus made an apostle!

It has been said that when Matthew rose up and left all to follow our Lord, the only thing he took with him out of the old occupation was his pen and ink. He had a persistent habit of making notes on the conversations and sermons of Jesus; and his journal stands out as the fullest, the most orderly, and the most perfect record of the words and acts of Jesus which has come down to us. This tax-gatherer became the ablest historian and best biographer of our Lord. Ruskin once said, if he were wrecked and could take only one book with him into solitude, that book would be Matthew's Gospel.

As a tax-collector Matthew had become skillful with his pen. As a disciple of Christ he put his facile pen to splendid use. He records much of the teachings of Jesus which the others do not. He gave us our fullest account of His greatest sermon—the Sermon on the Mount. He remembered and faithfully recorded His warnings concerning the peril of riches, from which Christ had saved him. The episode of the rich young ruler who kept to his money and declined to follow Jesus, greatly moved him. Matthew had done just the opposite. He had left all, but in Christ had found more than all; the young ruler "went away sorrowful: *for he had great possessions.*" He remembered Jesus adding that it was next to impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom —and did not this ex-publican know that?

Matthew alone tells us about the man who found a treasure hid in a field and sold all that he had to purchase that field and possess the treasure. He himself had done just that. He alone tells us of the pearl-merchant who found one pearl of great price worth more than all the rest put together, and sold all he had to purchase it. He too had sold all he had to get that one priceless thing. He had been well nigh ruined by greed and the love of gain. He had known Mammon as a master; he could not forget the strong words of Jesus: "No man can serve two masters. . . . Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Like all publicans, he had sought money first and God and goodness not at all, but now he treasures the Master's words on the importance of putting first things first: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

He exulted in the grace of Christ to the sinful, and His sympathy with the poor. His parable of the Great Supper to which He invited the poor, the despised and neglected as well as the lords of men, delighted him. He alone reports the dramatic judgment scene in which Christ makes it plain that He will finally judge men on the basis of what they have done (or not done) *for the needy ones of earth.* His publican heart was thrilled by the Master's golden words in which he identifies Himself with humanity, especially the unfortunate part of it, and accounts anything done for or against the poor as done for or against His very Self: "And the King shall say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of *the least of these my breth-*

ren, ye have done it unto me." (Chapter 25:40.) How gladly he reported the Great Invitation which was so rich a part of the transformed publican's experience as well as a grand summary of the mission of Christ to the world: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Matthew had experienced what Horatius Bonar in his hymn has voiced for multitudes of men.

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'Come unto me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon my breast':
I came to Jesus as I was
Weary and worn and sad;
I found in Him a resting-place,
And He has made me glad."

CHAPTER X

JOHN MARK IN THE MAKING

"And Barnabas was minded to take with them John also, who was called Mark. But Paul thought not good to take with them him who withdrew from them from Pamphylia and went not to the work."—Acts 15:37-38.

"Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable unto me for the ministry."—2 Timothy 4:11.

I

It is surprising how little the average Bible reader knows about John Mark. Everyone knows that one of the four gospel writers was a man named Mark, and that he was the author of the briefest biography of our Lord, the second book in our New Testament. But they know little of him.

Until recent years Mark and his little life of Jesus were looked upon as being rather unimportant as New Testament authors and books go. But this traditional view of Mark has been completely upset and altered by painstaking modern research. We now know that, far from being an unimportant writer of an unimportant gospel in imitation of other and greater writers—which theory held vogue for centuries in the Church—that his was the very first gospel to be written. John Mark was the pioneer gospel writer, the author of the most primitive and original life of Jesus. It is now evident that the other Evangelists copied from him, instead of he from them, as was for long supposed. It is not only certain that Mark's is the earliest of the Four Gospels, but that it is the historical framework of the others; that his gospel is reproduced in the others, especially in *Matthew* and *Luke*.

John Mark was one of Simon Peter's converts. Peter always spoke of Mark as "my son." He was his *spiritual* son, begotten of the fervent spirit of this erstwhile Galilean fisherman. Just as Paul, in writing to his young convert Timothy, always addressed him as "my son Timothy," so Peter referred to Mark as his spiritual son. And just as Timothy and Titus and Epaphroditus became associated with Paul in the extension of the gospel of Christ among the non-Jews, so Mark became closely allied with Peter in the extension of that same gospel among the Jews.

Peter, it seems, had been Mark's teacher. He was a close friend of Mark's mother, the widowed Mary, whose opulent and hospitable home was in Jerusalem. He and the other disciples of Jesus, and doubtless Jesus Himself, were often the guests of that home. The apostle had been a kind of second father to the young Mark.

It was in this religious and well-to-do home, then, a home which for years was the headquarters of the early Christians, that John Mark was nurtured. It was one of the first homes ever to open to Jesus anywhere, and certainly the first to open to Him in Jerusalem.

There can be little doubt that it was this home of Mary the mother of John Mark which became the famous Upper Room that figured so unforgettably in those stirring last days of Jesus and the first days of the early Church. It was here that the last Passover Supper was held; here, too, on that last evening of His earthly ministry, Jesus instituted and ate with the

Twelve the first Lord's Supper. In this room Judas confessed to having betrayed his Master to the priests of Jerusalem and fared forth to his doom.

This home became the first meeting place of the Christian Church, the earliest rendezvous of the followers of Jesus. It was here that they came to arrest Jesus, when the youthful Mark, awakened and frightened by the Roman soldiers and Judas searching the house at night for Jesus, fled, leaving his sleeping garment in the hands of the officers, while he probably rushed out naked to the Garden of Gethsemane to tell Jesus of their coming. This story of Mark's part in that fateful night's debacle is told by Mark himself. The little incident is certainly a touch of autobiography. It is probably the only autobiographical note he inserted in his charming narrative of Jesus. He says: "And a certain young man followed with him, having a linen cloth cast about him, over his naked body: and they laid hold on him; but he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked." (Mark 14:51-52.) This touchingly human and interesting incident has been called Mark's signature, "the signature of the artist in an obscure corner of the picture." There is little doubt that this "certain young man" was Mark himself. If so, it is indeed an interesting bit of autobiography.

It was in this Upper Room in Mark's house too that Jesus twice appeared to His dejected disciples: the first time to the Ten on Resurrection morning, and then one week later, to the Ten, with Thomas present, who because of a paroxysm of doubt and grief at the death of his Lord had not met with them the week before. It was here on the day of Pentecost that "the multitudes were gathered together with the disciples" when under the powerful preaching of Peter the Holy Spirit came mightily upon the whole

Church. To this same home of Mary and Mark came Peter (how naturally!) after his escape from prison where he had been thrown for the preaching of Christ. There was "a church in Mary's house," and that church was in prayer for the release of Peter and the welfare of the persecuted Christians.

Surely this is a sacred place—this first Christian shrine of Christian history; the scene of the Last Supper; the place of Judas' betrayal on the night before the Cross; the hiding-place for the despondent disciples during the garish days from Calvary to the Resurrection; the one welcome rendezvous of the early Christians; the room which had become the place of intense and eager prayer; and finally, the Holy Place where God by His Spirit somehow rushed upon these first Christians firing them with a wondrous enthusiasm which has ever since been termed, "the baptism of the Holy Spirit."

This Mary, the mother of John Mark, was not only a woman of means, able to shelter and support the early Christians, she was a woman of refinement and social standing in the community. And she was obviously a woman of courage.

To open her home to Jesus and the Christians in the infuriated Jerusalem of that day called for heroic courage. They were under a social and religious taboo. But she cut through the taboo and threw open her beautiful home to Him and His. That she was possessed of rare boldness and initiative is seen in the fact that at the very time when Jesus was crucified by the enraged populace of her city; and when Peter, the foremost leader of the Church, was in prison awaiting death; when James, the brother of John, had been killed by king Herod Agrippa to please the Jews—through it all she kept her home open to the Christians.

It was from such a home, devout, courageous, Christian, that John Mark came. May we not expect, then, that this young man will be a future force in Christianity? This was an atmosphere in which to grow a preacher. How could one come from a home regnant with the associations of Jesus and Peter and John and the valorous Mary, and not be lastingly impressed? Mary had planted the good seed, Peter and the Church would reap.

The young Mark was won to the Church by Peter, of whom Christ had said He would make "a fisher of men." I like to think that Mark was the first convert that Peter made. However this may be, it seems that he was a convert before the death of Christ, since when seeking to arrest Jesus they tried to capture Mark, who they knew was a friend of His. If tradition be true, John Mark was stocky and sturdy of build, raven-haired, sharp-eyed, peremptory, yet with a face mild and affable—a generous and genial nature. His was a temper quick, sometimes fiery, but sweet withal; and in the cultured but mystic atmosphere of his mother's home he had imbibed native purity and high breeding.

II

The Jerusalem of Mark's day was a seething caldron of old and new ideas. The new wine of Christ—to use His own very expressive figure—was bursting the old Jewish wine-skins. Mark lived at the parting of the ways. The old conservatism was going, though not without a desperate struggle. Gentiles as well as Jews were pressing into the Kingdom. Paul of Tarsus and Barnabas of Cyprus, Mark's cousin, were the foremost leaders in the progressive wing of the Church.

In them the Church went empiring among the Gentiles. They were planning to make a missionary tour, and thought of taking Mark with them. Mark answered the call and became an evangelist, a missionary to the Non-Jews. Paul and Barnabas went out, "taking with them John, whose surname was Mark."

Mark's decision to become a missionary, as is true of missionaries to this day, meant the giving up of much and the enduring of much; it meant the undergoing of many hardships, and hardships were as yet unknown to Mark. It may have been after no little struggle that this youthful disciple of Peter and Jesus, this unhardened city boy, this scion of wealth and ease, took leave of his widowed mother, his beloved home and city, to go as a missionary to foreign parts.

It is a serious matter when for the first time any serious young man severs the home ties to step out into a harsh and lackadaisical world, especially if he goes forth, as Mark does, to champion an unpopular cause and to face obstacles such as he would face. But

"So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
So near is God to man,
When Duty whispers, low, 'Thou must,'
The youth replies, 'I can.' "

Here is a noble trio: Barnabas, by long experience and contact with many men and many minds, made gentle and sympathetic; Paul the peerless and fearless preacher of Christ crucified for all; and John Mark, full of the enthusiasm, the idealism and the daring of youth. Forth they fare to parts unknown to bear the good news of Christ.

"Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia—we are reading from the book of Acts—*and John departed from them* *and returned to Jerusalem!*" Why this sudden reversal of procedure on the part of John Mark? for we are startled to learn that he leaves Paul and Barnabas at Perga in Asia Minor and beats a retreat homeward. Before they have reached the scene of their proposed labors Mark has turned back.

What is the trouble?

Paul, who was of Tarsus, was a liberal-minded Jew. He was taking what looked to Mark, of staid, orthodox Jerusalem, a too liberal view of the historic Jewish faith and a too placable attitude toward the Gentiles. Mark, for all his earnestness, was yet a Jerusalem Jew with views not nearly so elastic as Paul's. Then, Paul was fast striding to pre-eminence in the leadership of the Church. This seemed to irritate Mark. He was jealous. Barnabas had recognized the superior qualities of Paul and had gladly accepted a second place for himself. But Mark, it may be, did not like to see his cousin Barnabas eclipsed by the younger and less orthodox leader from Tarsus. Mark still had Peter's views. Peter had been very slow to admit Gentiles to a place in the Church. Visions had to be given him before he could bring himself to do so; even then he was at times squeamish about it. But Paul's program for the Gentiles was rapidly expanding. By the time they reached Perga it became evident to Mark that he was becoming over-enthusiastic for them. The old Jew in him flared up. The young disciple was swept by a gust of passion. Very suddenly he threw up the task and became a quitter. He began a solitary retreat homeward. Mark, used to languorous Jerusalem, and probably habituated at home to having his own way, persisted in having it now.

Jewish narrowness, however, was probably not the only reason for Mark's retreat. There were the hazards of the journey. Already they had encountered many of the various "perils" of which Paul later wrote in one of his epistles. Writing to one of his churches he sets down a striking list of hardships endured in his travels: "in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times I received forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness . . ." (2 Corinthians 11:23-27.) What an imposing list is this!

I wonder if in "perils of false brethren," Paul was including John Mark? I think it probable. To the tender young Mark Paul seemed as one mad. Dangers did not deter him. Discouraged and homesick anyhow, Mark wilted before the snarling hardships.

"In perils of robbers . . . in perils in the wilderness . . . " Here were the robber-infested Pisidian mountains rising like a wall, surly and threatening against the sky, with precipices sharp as a knife. The passes were either clogged with snow or gushing in dangerous rapids. Paul did not keep to the Asian coast; he made for the interior over the mountains.

These mountains abounded in lions and wolves and the treacherous hyena, and men more treacherous and less pitiful than these roamed in bands. Here lived a wild and lawless people whose habit of life was violence and robbery. John Mark reined his donkey. He would go no farther with this mad, terrible Paul. He thought Paul must be courting martyrdom, but not he. He was not yet ready to sing, "Where he leads me, I will follow." Behind him were the smiling fields of blooming flowers and fruitful trees. Behind him, too, his own dear Jerusalem, his friends and kin. Why clamber and perhaps perish in these cold and frightful crags? Back he went, and all Barnabas could do availed nothing.

Mark was a tender son of the city. This pale student of Jerusalem was no intrepid traveler, like Paul—not yet.

Beside the dread mountains, there were the brutal cities of the Gentiles. In one of these, Lystria, Paul was stoned and left for dead. In many another he was savagely beaten and imprisoned. Mark had been delicately brought up, and when called upon to keep pace with a self-sacrificing Barnabas or an invincible Paul amid all manner of hazards he turned coward and turned back.

Paul who had no regard for the tenderfoot, was indignant with Mark. He found it hard ever to forgive him his shameful fickleness.

Three years later Barnabas and Paul are starting on another mission tour. Barnabas, tolerant "son of consolation," wants to take Mark again, but Paul, stern and inflexible man of iron, flatly refuses. He will have nothing to do with this quitter. He is convinced that Mark is not made of the right kind of stuff for pioneer work. If he had deserted the work once in a pinch at Perga, who could say that he would not do so again. "Paul thought not good to take with them him who withdrew from Pamphylia, *and went not with them to the work."*

III

Mark cannot lightly be excused for his irresolution and indifference to foreign missions. (Nor can any

Christian.) The old Jewish prejudice that was in him, as it was in his spiritual father, Peter, had risen up and disarmed him for service among Non-Jews. If Mark, since it was the First Century and a striking, new departure from the old, may not be excused, certainly no Christian in the Twentieth Century can be. And just as "no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic, no heart is pure that is not passionate," so no Church and no disciple of Christ is safe that is not missionary-minded.

Whatever the reason for Mark's ugly desertion, the irrevocable act was done. He had betrayed his trust. His good name as an honored young leader in the Christian community, as yet unsullied, was now soiled with dishonor and suspicion. He was branded "unfaithful" by Paul and the Church generally.

But what cannot be recalled can be repented of; what cannot be undone, can be forgiven, and it is to the everlasting credit of John Mark that he broadened and deepened sufficiently to see his mistake. When Paul and Barnabas are ready to go on their next journey, Mark is also ready to go. He was one of those Jewish Christians who "were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been showered upon the heathen too." (Acts 10:45—Goodspeed.) But Paul had no faith in Mark. "He could not trust a staff which had once broken in his hand." Barnabas, however, the fatherly, brotherly Barnabas, was for quickly giving the young man a chance to redeem himself. There was a sharp contention. Mark was the cause of trouble between the two greatest apostles to the Gentiles. Because of their hot disagreement, "they separated," says Luke, "the one from the other." These companions in many a victory, comrades in many a trial, parted company and, so far as we know, never met again—all because of the unsteadiness and cowardice of John Mark. It was a trivial jangle as jangles go, this contention between Barnabas and Paul, a mere squabble between leaders; but a squabble which, having been recorded on the page of Scripture, has been conducted thus to immortality.

Paul goes on his journey, but Mark is left a rejected candidate for service in Asia. He was not re-appointed; was sadly disappointed.

It is an hour of crisis for Mark; an hour which will test the stuff of his young manhood. If there is gold in him this drastic test will show it up; but if he is not genuine what interest he may have in the Christian crusade will die. If this does not crush, but cures him of his fickleness, it will be a blessing, not an injury to him; and if he is not true blue this will crush his spirit; he will be embittered against the Church. This is what you would expect to happen to one of small manhood, to one who was less a man than John Mark.

Mark's sad blunder has placed him in a most embarrassing position. He has been branded by the leading apostle of the Church as one not to be trusted. His evil reputation spread rapidly throughout the Church. Everywhere Christians were warned against him. Mark is down. Will he turn cynic and fade from the Christian drama, or will he own his blunder and slowly rise to favor and worth again? Plainly a crisis is on him. We tremble for Mark. Having once so badly blundered he is in a position to blunder fatally now. What will be his next move?

"When the fight begins within himself
A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,
Satan looks up between his feet—both tug—
He's left, himself, i' the middle; the soul wakes
And grows."

Mark does nothing rash or foolish. He repents, is deeply regretful of his mistake. It had lost him a golden opportunity for splendid service. It will doom him to ten years or more of mediocrity and obscurity. He goes with Barnabas to Cyprus and is for years hidden, an inconspicuous attendant of inconspicuous men, when, all the time he might have been moving in the first advanced battalion of Christ's kingdom.

John Mark, however, was not the kind of man to remain hidden. Such a man may be obscured for a season, but he will rise again. Mark does that. But when he emerges once more, he is the associate of his old Master, Peter, and not Paul. He is now Peter's interpreter and secretary. Peter was a great preacher; Mark probably was not; but he was an able writer and scholar, which Peter was not. Peter did not write a gospel, but he has a gospel; Mark's gospel is really Peter's gospel. As that apostle went everywhere relating the story of Jesus, Mark became fully acquainted with it. When he spoke to Greeks and Romans he spoke through the lips of Mark, his interpreter. To be sure Mark could write a gospel of Jesus, but it would really be Peter's gospel. Says an early Church father, "Mark has delivered to us in writing the things preached by Peter." Peter and Mark finally took the gospel to Rome. Eusebius tells us that the Romans were so charmed by the discourses of Peter concerning Jesus, that, not contented with a single hearing of the story from the Apostle's lips, they urged Mark to leave them a record in writing. They persisted until Mark did so. Hence we have "The Gospel According to Mark."

If Peter was the means of Mark's conversion to Christ, he also played no small part in his recovery. Peter could best understand Mark. They were so much alike. Each possessed a fervent nature. Each had a wavering will. Each had failed terribly: Mark at Perga, Peter at the trial of Jesus in Jerusalem. He would tell the discouraged young disciple how he had boasted that he would go with Jesus to prison and death, but how on that night he was seized by fear and denied with ugly oaths that he even knew Him. He would tell Mark of his sorry stand that night, and how, after it was done, he choked with sobs and suffused with tears, and Jesus forgave him. He would tell how the Master had reinstated him in the work. Would He not do that for Mark too? Thus reassured by Peter, Mark made a new beginning. Mark teaches us that no failure need be final.

"Each day is a new beginning,
Each morn is the world made new,
Oh, ye who are weary of sinning,
Here's a hope and chance for you."

I wonder if Peter, Mark's patron saint, had, by his wavering, influenced Mark to a like instability? A chain is never stronger than its weakest link, and it is just possible that in the hour of Mark's test at Perga he recalled that Peter himself had once faltered. Such, at any rate, is the influence of the faults of our friends on us.

IV

But the last time we meet Mark he has worked himself back into unquestioned favor with the leaders of the Church. It is fifteen years after the Perga affair. But even Paul no longer thinks of suspecting him. When in prison at Rome near the end of his life, he writes his friend Timothy in terms of beautiful affection for Mark. He says: "Take Mark and bring him with thee; for he is profitable unto me for the ministry." Fifteen years before at Perga Paul had written "unworthy" across his name. He was then most *unprofitable,* but now most *profitable.* The estrangement had been fully healed. Such generosity to a rival craftsman, even of the soul, is as beautiful as it is rare.

Effective as Peter had been in the making of John Mark, it was Paul who had done most to re-make him. There is good reason to believe that Mark had been spoilt. He had been brought up softly—the idol of an overly-fond mother. He had a strong tendency toward indolence and ease; was inclined to be unsteady, weak. He needed to be tempered, needed to have his spirit stabbed awake.

This Paul had done for the unsteady Mark. He had refused to endanger his missionary enterprise by taking such a weakling with him. It seemed a hard blow, but it was what Mark sorely needed. He began to see himself then as he really was—a deserter unfit for high service in the Kingdom. In this Mark was a signal confirmation of the truth of the old adage, "Reproof never does a wise man harm."

Paul was never anything but a well-wisher of John Mark's. Even in his inflexible dealing with him he was saying to him what is expressed in the words of Ella Wheeler Wilcox's poem:

"Upon the wreckage of thy yesterday
Design thy structure of tomorrow. Lay
Strong corner-stones of purpose, and prepare
Great blocks of wisdom cut from past despair.
Shape mighty pillars of resolve, to set
Deep in the tear-wet mortar of regret.
Believe in God—in thine own self believe,
All thou hast hoped for thou shalt yet achieve." [1]

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[1] *Quotable Poems,* Willett, Clark & Colby, *Pub.*

Mark left Paul and Barnabas at Perga, but he "came back" gloriously in his work with Peter. And when Paul languished in his Roman prison awaiting Nero's bloody ax, one of the two or three men in the world he wanted by him in these last hours was John Mark. "Bring Mark," he pleads with Timothy, "for he is profitable to me." Tradition has it that Mark and Timothy arrived in Rome in time to see Paul before his martyrdom; and that they were captured and imprisoned, although Mark finally escaped. Under the touch and tutorage of Jesus timid believers, such as were Simon Peter and John, became irresistible apostles. And by that same spirit the timid, dilly-dallying Mark at last achieved unflagging constancy.

V

John Mark impresses us as having been an eminently sane man. Only once did he lose his head; and that during his youth. Every man is apt to play the fool sometimes in his life, but no man need keep up the performance. Mark didn't. Never again, so far as we know, was he given to folly of weakness. That Perga experience had been a dear lesson to him.

"Lord, let me make this rule
To think of life as school
And try my best
To stand the test,
And do my work
And nothing shirk."

If further proof were needed of how entirely John Mark repented and was remade, we would have it in the gospel he wrote. It was not only the first gospel, the one on which all others were based, it is a great gospel. For years Paul had been watching the career of Mark. He had once thought him hopelessly fickle. He had come to see himself mistaken in that opinion. Mark's gospel had circulated all through the Church. It had come into Paul's hands in Rome. He had read it, we may be sure, with much delight there in his prison.

From his gospel it is evident that Mark's old prejudice against the Non-Jews is gone. He even addresses it to Non-Jews, and that section of them most detested by the Jews, the Romans. His is the shortest, most primitive, and most human portrait of Jesus. Matthew sets forth Christ in His significance for doctrine and theology; Luke set Him forth in His humaneness; John in his eternal character, the living *Logos* or eternal *Word* of God; but Mark combines all and gives us the most life-size portrait of Jesus we possess—he paints the Jesus of *action,* the Christ of golden *deeds.* His is a book of mighty works. He recounts all the miracles of Jesus, but very few of the parables. His narrative is the most graphic, simple and objective, the most terse and concise of all. It is full of realism and enthusiasm. Mark uses the word "straightway" more than forty times. In every way he sets forth Jesus as "the strong Son of God." All this was in line with the Roman's love of action and power. It has been said that Mark's gospel might well be called "the Acts of Jesus." Says Salmond, "It depicts the wonder and awe with which Christ's words were listened to and His mighty deeds witnessed. It shows us the fear, the astonishment, the sore amazement of the disciples." It shows us the human, matter-of-fact, but none the less Divine, Jesus.

John Mark never came to pre-eminence as a leader in the Church, like Barnabas or Peter or Paul; but he had a genius for helping all these great men. No man in the early Church was more "profitable for ministering" to great men than John Mark. He was the great "servant of the servants of God."

The words of Jesus which Mark best loved to stress were those about the exaltedness of service: "If any man would be first, he shall be last of all." "Whosoever would become great among you, shall be your servant; and whoever would be first among you shall be servant of all." Mark had learned this golden lesson only after humbling experiences such as the one at Perga. Thus do we all learn the way of the servant. In the words of Browning:

"Then welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand, but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain;
Strive and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare never grudge the throe!

"So take and use thy work;
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same." [1]

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[1] *Poems,* Robert Browning, Houghton, Mifflin Co.

CHAPTER XI

THE PRODIGAL SON

Luke 15:11-24.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is the most perfect and lucid bit of teaching that ever fell from the lips of any teacher, not excepting the Great Teacher Himself. It is one of those finished literary gems which one fears to touch lest he mar and diminish its beauty. To touch it seems almost to spoil it; and to attempt to explain it is like lifting a candle to cast light on the sun—an obviously futile undertaking. But if we may clarify a little—not the parable, surely, but our imperfect vision—if we may strengthen our inner sight as the microscope aids and abets our natural sight, it may perchance, enable us to see herein new and undiscovered wonders.

This parable has been called "the most divinely tender and the most humanly touching story ever told." Nor is it too much to say that this "tale of the olden ages" contains the very heart of the gospel; enshrines the very essence of Calvary; and is in every sense "an epitome of human experience". It is the life and teaching of Christ in luminous miniature; an idyllic tale of the love of God toward the vagabonds of the race. "Where in the entire range of human literature," asks Farrar, "can anything be found so terse, so luminous, so full of infinite tenderness—so faithful to the picture which it furnishes of the consequences of sin, yet so merciful in the hope which it affords to amendment and penitence—as this little story?" In this incomparable tale of sin, repentance, and restoration every word tells; every sentence goes to the heart of the subject; "scene succeeds scene in perfect and easy arrangement; and the whole is brought to a harmonious close."

The story: A certain man had two sons. And the younger, dissatisfied with the tame life he was leading at home, said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

In no time at all the young man turned his property into cash and had the money in his pocket. With that "auroral freshness of soul which is the distinctive charm of youth", and in the spirit of infinite swagger he said "good-by" to home-folks, walked out of the yard and took his journey into a far country, where he fell in with dissolute and gay young fellows who assisted him quickly in "wasting his substance with riotous living". With the abandoned audacity of youth he spent his jubilant powers. He passed from one stage to another in his downward course till he reached the lowest.

His colorful career of sin, indulgence, and gaiety was meteoric; for, just then, as evil fortune would have it, there came a mighty famine which brought the Prodigal to suffering and want. Without a friend, poor, and in the direst straits, we see him feeding swine—a more sunken occupation than which a Jew could not follow.

Now it is that memory gets in her valuable work; he "comes to himself", he reflects, regrets, repents, and resolves to return home, confess his folly, and ask the place of a slave in his father's household. He carries out his intention: he arises and returns home to find an undreamed of reception at the hands of his good father, who reinstates him an honorable member of the family. Jesus sets forth the career of the Prodigal in several well-marked scenes.

I

There is, then, first, his *request,* in which revolt and self-will are manifest: "Give me the portion of thy substance that falleth to me." The lad itched for something of life; to him, as one has said, "Home was irksome; its freedom carried restraints. The boy craved freedom without restraints. The tediousness of his dull brother and the loving rule of his father fretted him. Life beckoned. There were entrancing worlds beyond the disciplines of home. Illusory worlds!—the primal lie of liberty without law! His father made no attempt to hold him. How could he? Home would not be home to a boy of alien will. He made no immediate attempt to find him when he 'took his journey'. The boy must first find himself. So he divided unto each son his rightful share."[1]

> "Though God be good and free be heaven,
> No force divine can love compel."

The young man's mind had been poisoned. He was intoxicated with the lure of sights unseen, and experiences untried. He must burn his fingers. He lusted for the unindulged. Perhaps he had read a bad book, or it may be that unscrupulous companions had poured into his ears the bewitching story of the enchanting world of which he knew nothing. So—having a high opinion of himself—he breaks away from that best of all homes, and from the best of all fathers, and journeys to a distant land to get his fill of "life". He is on the primrose path that leads to the far country.

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[1] From *The Parables of Jesus,* Butterick, PP. 189-190. Published by Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., New York. Used by permission.

"A young man with a little money," he had been told, "can command anything." Like many modern prodigals, he was bent on having a "career". Think of the prodigals on the screen. A living writer of note comments on the spiritual barrenness of these gifted ones, as those who "perform the most daring feats of courage for the screen without being either honorable or courageous in the great moral drama of living." The movie world of to-day is alive with prodigals. Think of the sham, the unreality, the trading of husbands and wives; think of the ban on the home, of the prostitution of the finer virtues of living to the idol called "career". In his name husbands must be scrapped, honor sacrificed, and too often, character tarnished, if not blighted.

Yet these glorified prodigals reach greater audiences than the preachers and teachers of righteousness, and have a wider influence upon our national standards of life from every angle than our universities do.

The law is plain, "What a man soweth, that shall he also reap." And it works slowly or swiftly, but inevitably. This young fool thought he could be freer and happier without morals or virtues. But he found out different, as those foolish "realists" and "primitives" among us to-day will, only they may do so only after the house of our morals comes crashing down upon us, like Samson's temple, which he pulled down killing himself and all within.

But the merry Prodigal is now in the far country—far from the old hated restraints. Now he can have a good time—can yield himself to the urge and surge of his youthful ardor—can live in unfettered joy!

A band of buxom high-lifers swarmed about him, a gang of jovial spendthrifts. They took in everything: fine dress, bad women, places of pleasure, haunts of vice, costly banquets, drinks—nothing glittering or scampish escaped this folly's band until the Prodigal's goodly stock of "substance" was gone. The gleam and glitter of sin's tawdry tinsel had swept him, charmed and fascinated, to poverty and the brink of moral ruin.

The sweet-natured, weak-willed, simple-hearted ne'er-do-well had been living to gratify the passing moment's whim. He had been a loitering recreant, a tippling vagabond. Vice had been invested with an irresistible charm; he had yielded completely to its mesmeric spell. Passion had been given free rein. But, as the old adage has it, "the passions are like fire and water, good servants, but bad masters".

Folly brought swift destitution: "There arose a mighty famine", a famine of money, a famine of friends—of these he had had plenty while his cash lasted; of fair weather friends, a host. But now "no man gave unto him". Where are his buddies now? Where are his friends? "What is that to us? see thou to that." As in the case of Judas, the tool is cast away as soon as its work is done. A proverb says, "Help me to money and I'll help myself to friends; but an empty purse frightens away friends." Ah, but didn't the Prodigal know it now?

Not only had he lost his money and his friends: his reputation was gone, and his self-respect. There was a famine, too, in the bare necessities of life: "He began to be in want." He was penniless, friendless, homeless. "Now what chance," asks Dr. Whyte, "in the midst of a mighty famine had a prodigal son who had already wasted his means by fast living? What hope was there for him? What could a penniless spendthrift do?"

Sin is madness, and, in its depths, degregation and desperation. Was not this wastrel mad? He had squandered all for rags and shame and misery. But he has struck bottom now. The futile flame of his folly is spent. He has been a wilful, sinful, self-governed young man, a victim of foolish fancy. What a buoyant spirit he had been! impetuous, sentimental, rash; he is now a profitless profligate.

Following his wasted resources comes want, and at the heels of want comes degradation. He does the extreme thing—becomes a swine-herd. He hires himself out to feed pigs—as said before, the deepest degradation to which a young Jew could come, the most contemptible occupation an Oriental can think of —"A task whose utter shame only a Jew could feel." And, it is true in the Orient to-day. "You cannot," says Rihbany, "hire a Syrian to make a pet of a 'little piggie'. If he did, he would be called 'pig man' for the rest of his life, and transmit that unenviable title to posterity, 'even unto the third and fourth generation'." Even in Egypt, although animals were adored there, the only people forbidden to enter the temple were the swine-herds. No father would have given his daughter to wife to a swine-herd and no woman for all the gold in the world would have married a swine-herd. For a Jew to be servant to a Gentile was in itself considered a degradation, and to feed swine was to sink still lower. Jesus shows us the forlorn figure of the youth who has dissipated his fortune watching the swine crunching the pods of the carob tree. "And he fain would have filled his belly with the husks which the swine did eat."

So fierce was his hunger that he fell to feeding on these "husks" upon which the swine fed—carob or locust bean pods which, as provender for animals, was not so bad, but as food for humans was very poor. In eating carob, said the Syrians, you have to consume a cord of wood to get an ounce of sweet.

What a contrast between his present mean state and the care-free days of his wild-oat-sowing episode! Sin brings not only servitude, but shameful servitude. This wanderer tried to live, not only on empty husks, but *"the husks which the swine did eat"*. Degradation, as Robertson of Brighton has said, is the application of a thing to purposes lower than that for which it was intended. For a man to attempt to live on husks, for one to try, as did the rich farmer in that other parable of Jesus, to feed his soul on corn, is degradation, because these are not his true food. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

"Sent him"—Where is now his boasted freedom? His pilgrimage of "personal liberty" has come to a lurid halt amid the swine. He is *driven* now. He is a victim of the old delusion that laws can be destroyed by ignoring them, that God can be evaded by forgetting Him. Men who disobey God in their ways seek to forget God in their thoughts. In the far country the Prodigal thought as little as possible of his father. It was only as he "came to himself" that he bethought himself of his father's house. He knew all the while that he had a father, but whether his father was dead or alive did not much matter to him then. Men far away from God choose not to think of God, in fact it is *thoughtlessness* which puts men in the far country from God. The lost man, like a stray sheep is lost through *thoughtlessness;* and like that same witless sheep, blindly gropes in sin after the *summum bonum.*

Three things make sin the greatest of tragedies—abuse of God's gifts, abuse of God's goodness, and blindness to man's dignity. Of these the Prodigal, as is every prodigal, was guilty. We measure the depths to which a man sinks by the heights to which he may soar.

The Prodigal had been living below what the early pioneers of New England called "the snake line". The early settlers of the new world built their homes, churches and schools at a certain height to keep out of danger of poisonous snakes. It was learned that above a certain level these snakes did not range: below that level it was not safe to live. When he left home and went into the far country, the Prodigal went down below the moral snake line.

Man's estrangement from God is not only his own, but God's loss. In the separation of man from God two souls suffer. As that good father sadly missed his sinning lad, so God misses the presence and service of all His vagabond children.

The abuse of the best is ever the worst. Virtues easily become vices in the far country. Love perverted becomes lust; spirituality becomes sensuality. Refuse to soar and you sink. "The man who lives to do as he likes becomes the slave of his likes." The Prodigal's request was born of self-will; self-will ended in self-ruin. Self-will is not our true self. The far country can never be our true home.

II

In the second place, the Prodigal *reflects*—reflects on what he has done.

"When he came to himself"—with invincible optimism Jesus declares that for a time this lad had been beside himself. In sin he had not been his true self. No man is. We say of one whom we know and love, who has for a time given way to a sin, "he was not himself". We know him to be more than his failures.

Just so Jesus judged humanity. He never made light of sin, never condoned it. To Him it was always tragic. But to Him the sinner was not the real man. Sin was a bondage, a tyranny, a madness, and it was when that tyranny, that bondage was broken that a man came to himself. Jesus came to make men and women their true selves.

In coming to himself the Prodigal was on the ladder that leads to God. Men must come to themselves before they can come to God. Amid the swine the wretched youth sat down and reflected. He grew ghastly wan and weak and thought of home. He was wrinkle-visaged, gaunt, shaggy. His countenance had taken on a death-like hue. His lips were palid, his body emaciated. The heat had gone out of his blood, the sparkle out of his eyes; and in the cold reality of retrospect he now saw everything in a different light. No longer did his father's house seem flat and stale. He was flushed with mingled indignation, chagrin, and disappointment. His breezy buoyancy had given place to melancholic morbidity. His spirit was palsied and sere. His soul poured itself forth in one unceasing radiation of gloom. How stupid he had been! He quavered tremulously as he contemplated the pitiable plight into which he had fallen.

Of all the artists who have striven to depict this scene in the Prodigal's career, none have so well succeeded, it seems to me, as has Puvis de Chavanness, who pictures him sitting on a rock in tatters in a forlorn spot in the far country. The description of this picture I give in the words of another.

"The youth is supposed to be taking care of the swine, but he has turned his back on them. Business more important than they is on hand and is going to be settled before the sun goes down. The wretched boy sits on a ragged rock, himself in rags, and in the intensity of his thought he hugs his naked breast and grips his legs together. He is a picture of want and irresolute revery.

"But our main interest centers in that one burning eye! Deepset and haggard though it is, a light of memory and of conscience redeems it and shows us that the soul is still alive. Before it are passing pictures out of his past, some faded and hideous, some sweet and appealing; but the wonder of it is that each of these pictures stands now in a different light from what it did before, as if a wizard had wrought on it with magic! There are the scenes of pleasure, one by one, the episodes of the riotous living, once so brilliant and altogether to be desired, but seen now from the distance of this field of swine, so garish and tawdry. Here comes the sequence of his loves, his charms, who once through the glamour of wine seemed fit companions of the Graces, but now vampires all,—'a rag and a bone and a hank of hair'. There is the dull old home with the dull old people in it; yet somehow those sober harmonies now begin to glow with the richness of remembered dreams, and in particular that father's face tugs at the heart and brings the hands instinctively to the bosom. How the hard knocks of life have laid bare the eternal values! The apples of Sodom that looked so fair in their baskets of tinsel have turned to ashes at the touch, and what once seemed only dross now gleams like gold. O son, son! Haven't you had enough of wilfulness and sin, the wages of which the devil is now paying you to the uttermost farthing? Hold fast, I pray you, to that picture of the old home till its outlines shut out every other sight,—and at the door the bowed and gray old father looking long, long, long for you!"[1]

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[1] From *The Gospel in Art* by Albert E. Bailey. *Copyright,* The Pilgrim Press. Used by permission.

Reflection had brought him to himself—evidence, this, of the Godwardness of man's soul though his body be degraded. His conscience was not dead; it arose to proclaim him an immortal being dowered with an instinct for God, though neglected and outraged, yet capable of reasserting itself, filling his soul with divine longing.

Sensualism can satisfy no man's soul, because man is more than a mere animal. There is a certain sweetness, a certain animal satisfaction, let us say, in sin; but the Prodigal's delight in vice, as is ever true, was short-lived, ephemeral. There is nothing to indicate that the hogs among which the Prodigal found himself were not fully satisfied; they were blissfully content with the pig-sty and the husks. But man cannot feed his soul on husks; he cannot tread the mire and feel that he is himself. While the pigs grunted contentment, the pangs of hell got hold on the Prodigal. He could not forget that he was made for something better. He heard a voice saying, "Thou wast not born for this!"

He had a swift passage from the sublime to the ridiculous, from the supernal to the sepulchral. Plaintive and petulant among the pigs, he now saw that every cause has its effect—sad sequel to the halcyon days of his prodigality. Sharp adversity, solemn-souled trial had dissipated his insanity and made him sensible.

A husk is an empty thing; it looks like food, but it is not food. Only a little nourishment is to be gotten from a large amount of these carob pods. When eaten they stay the appetite, but leave the body unnourished and emaciated. By eating these the poor Prodigal seemed to be filling himself, while in reality he was receiving little nutrition.

Sin is an empty husk. It is the experience of all who go sin's way that "bubble after bubble bursts, each bubble tinted with the celestial colors of the rainbow, and each leaving in the hand which crushes it a cold damp drop of disappointment". To the Prodigal the ennui of disillusionment has come. It is an experience calculated to raise the flood-gate of happy recollections. What a contrast between the rich parental home which he had foolishly left and the extremely embarrassing state in which he now finds himself! Truly, he "has turned aside from a celestial feast to prey on garbage". So has everyone who finds contentment in the far country from God.

III

The next scene is the one in which the Prodigal *repents.*

It is not easy for one who has acted the craven, for one who has won himself the stigma of sin, for one who has cringed before the community's scorn, to "come back"—though it can be done. But no man can live down his past if he continues to live down on the level with his past. He must rise above it. Someone has said, "Shame is the dying embers of virtue." But after shame comes (or should come), repentance, and following that, one is on the long, up-hill road to virtue's restoration. The Prodigal's better self had been long buried, but now it begins to break through and assert itself. His soul begins to peer through the rubbish of its toppled-down house and vision something better. His sickly sense of self-respect takes a heroic stride forward. He visions the moral grandeur that may yet be his if he "arises", and the unutterable debauchery if he does not; he bounds forth at last, sensing that there is

"No retreat, no retreat,
They must conquer or die
Who have no retreat."

Unthinking folly had brought him to grief; but reason now comes to her own. "Why," said he, "the servants in my father's house are better off than I am: they have plenty to eat and to wear, and I perish with hunger; I sit in rags." Repentance has its source in hungers of one kind or another. No hunger, no repentance. Satiety and ease make repentance difficult and rare. Repentance is scarcer in our day of sunny complacency than it was, for example, in the hazardous days of the American pioneers.

"I will arise and go to my father." He might have said, as many do, "I'm not fit to go home like this. I must try and improve these rags; I must a little replenish my depleted purse; I must make a better appearance." But reason trumpeted her voice. Would he get any better? Would his rags improve? Would delay remedy his plight? A thousand times no! He reached the only sane conclusion in the golden resolution he made: *"I will arise!* I'll have done with this place. I'll be a fool no longer. I'm through with pigs and all who live like pigs. Off! Off! to my father's house!"

"And I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned: I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." The young man has a very different idea of his father now than when he left home on his pilgrimage of sin. He has a different idea of himself, too; then he had the "big head", now he has a level head. Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other, and scarcely in this.

James Stalker has said that when the Prodigal was fretting against the disciplines of home and planning to escape them, that he called his conduct Independence; that in the far country, when bright eyes were shining on him and soft arms caressing him, he called it Pleasure; but later, after he had wasted his money, and friends and lovers had forsaken him, he called it Ill-luck; that even when he began to reflect on coming to himself, he only called it Folly; but now he really repents, he has found the right name for his action—Sin; *"I have sinned."* He did not blame his father, nor even his knavish companions, but said, "*I* have sinned." He called it sin—*his* sin. Sin is not so much a social or corporate affair as it is a personal and individual.

That famous penitent of old might have laid his sin to environment, inheritance or something else, as we do today, but he did not. His was the spirit of the negro spiritual,

> "It's me, it's me, it's me, O Lord,
> Standin' in the need of prayer."

Listen to him—

> "Have mercy upon *me,* O God, according to thy loving kindness:
> Wash *me* thoroughly from *my* iniquity,
> And cleanse *me* from *my* sin.
> For I acknowledge *my* transgressions;
> And *my* sin is ever before *me.*
> Against thee, thee only have *I* sinned,
> And done that which is evil in thy sight.
>
> . . . .
>
> Purge *me* with hyssop, and *I* shall be clean:
> Wash *me,* and *I* shall be whiter than snow.
> Create in *me* a clean heart, O God,
> And renew a right spirit within *me.*
> Cast *me* not away from thy presence;
> And take not thy holy spirit from *me."* [1]

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[1] Italics are the Author's.

The language of this penitent in the *Psalms* was that of the Prodigal in spirit, at least, as he sat in the swine-field mulling, lost in dark day-visions. Though conscious of his depth in sin and his distance from God, he saw "That men may rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things."

"He arose." He looked up, then got up. On his rickety legs he trudged out of the far country toward home, fixed in his purpose to make a clean breast to his father.

Somewhere I have seen a letter penned by a prodigal in the far country to his parents. David Gray, a Scotch poet, was a lad of fine promise. He longed for a life of letters, and nothing would do him but to leave his home near Glasgow and go to London, there to make his fame. He fell into a dissolute life, took consumption and was fast dying. Here is the letter he wrote:

"Dear parents,—I am coming home—homesick. I cannot stay from home any longer. What's the good of being so far from home and ill? O God, I wish I were home, never to leave it more. Tell everybody that I am coming back—no better, worse, worse. What about climate, about frost, or snow or cold weather when one's at home? I wish I had never left it. I have no money, and I want to get home, home, home. What shall I do, O God? Father, I shall steal to you again, because I did not use you rightly. Will you forgive me? I have come through things that would make your heart ache for me—things that I shall never tell to anybody, but to you, and you shall keep them secret as the grave. Get my own little room ready—quick, quick: have it all tidy and cozy and clean against my home-coming. I wish to die there, and nobody shall nurse me except my own dear mother, ever, ever again. Oh, home, home, home!"

The giving way to youthful impulses, the reckless following of the physcal instincts has brought at last more than one gifted soul to Edgar Allen Poe's Raven croak of "Nevermore."

IV

The last scene in the career of the Prodigal is one of the grandest ever conceived: his *return and restoration.* Here is the best picture of the all-forgiving, all-loving Father. The wanderer is nearing home. The good father has waited long for his return. Every day since the lad went away he has stood and gazed down the road as far as the dimming eye of age would carry; if perchance he might catch sight of his boy returning. Every night he sat by his window and looked, till once more darkness fell on all the land; and through the dark hours he listened for the footsteps that never came. The years dragged themselves along heavily. Would he ever come?

So God in the lonely battlefield of the heart endures the grief and suffering of passionate love over erring ones who are destroying themselves in wandering from Him; for "every prodigal in treading the primrose path to the far country has trodden over the loving heart of God." But our restless youth is still blissfully heedless of the parable, forever clinging to the priceless right to make our own mistakes.

One day he glimpsed a figure entering the lane. The dogs, it may be, barked fiercely at the suspicious stranger approaching. But while yet a great way off the father knew the ungainly figure to be his own son, and ran to him—

"And is this you, my son? A fine sight you are! See what you have brought upon yourself, your father and your home! You left a prince and return a beggar!

You come home only after you have destroyed yourself, and the world has cast you out. Why do you come here?" But enough! Impossible invention. Such rebuff might have come from some fathers, but not from *his;* rather as Holmes has it, though in another connection, in a strong line in his *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table,* his good father, "moved with compassion",

"Clasps the young scapegrace with paternal joy,
Sobs on his neck, '*My Boy!* MY BOY!! MY BOY!!!'"[1]

He said, "Bring forth the best robe"—all the marks of the far country must be covered! Love, not spurning. "Put a ring on his finger"—token of re-establishment! "Shoes on his feet"—the mark of a free man; he is not a slave to go barefoot, but a son, and must be shod as an honored member of a respectable family! "Bring the fatted calf and kill it"—guests of honor are to be treated to the best. "And they began to be merry"—all were festive and convivial save one—the surly Elder Brother.

As has been suggested, try to invent a different ending for this story than that which it has, and you destroy the noblest picture of God's love and redeeming grace ever conceived.

"As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." And those who do not fear him! No shabbiest prodigal of us all, given daily to wounding God's heart in abuse of life, but has a place in His heart that nothing else can fill. And when we tear away from Him, chafed at His rule, tired of the tameness of His home, He misses us, can't forget us, often steals to the door, and gazes up and down the road, longing for our return; and if at last

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[1] *Century Readings in American Literature.*

He sees "a ragged, dusty, hesitating thing", looks toward it eagerly, runs to it swiftly with outstretched arms, His face aglow with welcome as He cries, "My son, my son," and gathers him, rags, shame and all close to His heart.

"Dost thou behold thy lost youth aghast?
Dost reel from righteous retribution's blow?
Then turn from blotted archives of the past
And find the future's page white as snow.

"Art thou a mourner? Rouse thee from thy spell;
Art thou a sinner? Sins may be forgiven;
Each morning gives thee wings to fly from hell,
Each night a star to guide thy feet to heaven.

. . . .

"Though deep in mire, wring not your hands and weep;
I lend my arm to all who say, 'I can'
No shame-faced outcast ever sank so deep
But yet might rise again and be a man!"[1]

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[1] *Opportunity,* Walter Malone. *Quotable Poems,* Willett, Clark & Colby.

CHAPTER XII

THE ELDER BROTHER

Luke 15:25-32

I

The Parable of the Prodigal Son, so called, is in two parts. One might better say it consists of two distinct stories. The first deals with a father and his wilful younger son; the second treats of that same father and an older son who is obstinate and self-righteous.

In the first story the Prodigal is the main character whilst in the second he plays only a minor rôle. In the second story the father is the hero and the Elder Brother the villain. The first story closes, after tracing the Prodigal step by step in his career of vice, with his arrival back at the paternal home where a feast is being staged in his honor. Our last chapter closed with the opening act of that glad scene. We saw the whole household—all save one—in a holiday humor, turning the place into a celebration of joy and festivity because of the safe return of the younger son. "And they began to be merry"—and with this the first section of this golden parable closes.

There is a wide-spread feeling among students and lovers of the parable that here it should have ended; and that here, as Farrar says, "it would have ended had the mystery of human malice and perversity been other than it is". True, the Elder Brother is a discord; his entrance seems an intrusion; he makes an ugly climax to the sublimest picture of the love of God ever created. Who has not wished that the story had concluded with the feast of rejoicing at the return of the Prodigal? But the parable is a portrayal of life, and life is not ideal, not free from the ugly and sordid. We would have it ideal, but must take it as it is, must accept, often, the *actual,* the *real,* in lieu of the *ideal.*

II

This older brother stands in sharp contrast in every way to the younger. He was a dutiful, methodical, dependable, plodding young man; perfectly proper, and perfectly uninteresting. He worked hard, saved his money, was a filial son of his father, a most respectable citizen. None could point to anything amiss in his conduct. He was a worker. Day after day, all day long, throughout the slow-moving years he toiled on his father's farm. He was busy at work in the field when his brother tramped in from his far-country rambles. As he came from his work he observed that something unusual was going on. The whole household was astir making ready for the feast. On coming nearer he heard music and merry-making. "What's up?" he demanded, "What does all this racket mean?" The servant of whom he had enquired made answer: "Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed for him the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound."

The upshot of it all was the arousing of rage within the breast of the Elder Son. All were festive and mirthful but him: mirthful he would not be. No loud laudations came from his lips. On the other hand, he was furious—so angry that he "would not go in". He was hot in his disapproval; aglow with indignation. To him their music was but noise, a hideous clatter. Their merry-making was altogether out of place.

Then his good father came out and invited him to join the celebration within. Wouldn't he come in and sit at the table with his brother? He was churlish and cantankerous, and refused. He heaped opprobium upon the whole affair. He made one of the most ungracious and ugly speeches recorded in the New Testament. The father entreated him to be reconciled to his brother and forgive him; but he was sullen and petulant—was adamant still. Said he, "Lo, these many years have I served thee, and *I* never transgressed a commandment of thine; and yet thou never gavest *me* a kid. . . . You never made a splurge over me; for me, you never even killed a kid, much less a calf. . . . But when this thy son was come, who hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for *him* the fatted calf." Look at this man, this baby, sulking outside the door of his father's house.

The irate young legalist called attention to his own spotless life. "Behold," cried he, "for these many years I have been a slave unto you, never transgressing an order of yours." He thought of his father as a hard taskmaster. He is not to be condemned because he was a hard worker—that was commendable—but for the spirit in which he did his work. He worked not for work's sake, nor for duty's sake, but for work's material reward. He was the farmer sunk in his farm, the man sunk in his job, his soul was subject to dollars. He pointed with pride to the length and faithfulness of his service; was well satisfied with his own worthiness. He believed himself an object of genuine congratulation. "I have never done anything bad," he said; but his father might have asked him what he had ever done that was good? True, he had not been sensual or low as his brother had. His garments certainly were not rank with the stench of the pig-sty. He had never visited the far country. But what *positive* good had he done? Whom had he helped? Henry Drummond has pointed out that there are two classes of sins—sins of the *body,* and sins of the *disposition.* The Prodigal was guilty of the first, the Elder Brother of the second.

But there is hope for this younger son. He will never go wild again. Never again will he break his father's heart, by giving himself up to the bondage and vagabondage of sin; for though once very self-confident and conceited, he is now modest, meek and docile as some caught thing. He has hobbled home, begrit, bedraggled, stripped of vanity, disillusioned. He may be said to have had courage of a kind—wild and unbridled—but self-possession he has never had—*till now.* Now he is home; and home shall ever be sweet to him. He could have sung with Whittier that pæan of repose:

"I know not where his islands lift
  Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
  Beyond his love and care."

For one with a sense of need there is always hope, but for the respectable, self-righteous formalist who can boast that he has never gone seriously astray, and thanks God that he is not as other men, there is little. It is a negative view of life. One hears much of it to-day—this limping idea of goodness, this negative religion (if religion it can be called): "I do *not* do this or that;" but no one wants to hear what one has *not* done, rather we want to *see* what one *is doing!* To all possessed of the Elder Brother spirit, the poet's lines well apply:

"I never cut my neighbor's throat;
  My neighbor's gold I never stole;
I never spoiled his house or land;
  But God have mercy on my soul!

For I am haunted night and day
  By all the deeds I have not done;
O unattempted loveliness!
  O costly valor never won!"

Said the churl, "Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." One wonders if he had any friends. Back when the father divided his property with the two sons, at the request of the younger, had he not, in accordance with true Oriental custom received twice as much as the Prodigal? The truth is he was an ugly malcontent, who, for a trifle was willing to precipitate a mischievous jangle. Here he stands in sullen humor, jealous, full of envy. His heart is not so much stony as wooden, or he would yield to the father's tender appeal and be brotherly. He is an uncharitable fault-finder. Petulance is a foible of his.

"But when this thy son came, who hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou didst kill for *him* the fatted calf." He spoke in distain black with emphasis. Love covereth a multitude of sins; but he was loveless. He was a foul-fingered hocum-hunter muckraking in the sorry "past" of a brother. It was cruel after the Prodigal's repentance and reformation, to drag this vile serpent from the slimy grave of the dead past. He was venomous. But the father said not a word regarding the sins of his wayward son. If ever silence was golden it was here. This act of mercy sheds an epic splendor on the incident which transforms God into the symbol of an all-compelling love for erring humankind.

How different with the Elder Son! How his salacious and slurring words, if they came to the ears of the Prodigal, must have hurt him. True, of course; but why should he blurt out the devastating truth at such a time as that? And how they hurt the father's heart, we may well guess. But for all the spleen of the Elder Son, note the generosity of the father toward him also—toward him who represents the Jewish Church and nation. How he pleads with him not to *feel,* much less *display* any harshness or reproach toward his younger brother, the Gentile world! Note with what tact and forbearance he answers him: "My dear son, thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine."

What if the father had given gifts to the Prodigal and for him had killed the fatted calf? Not only the fatted calves, the things of value which he might confer upon the Elder Son in the future of his lifetime, were his, but *all that he had was his.* The Prodigal could share only in the profits of his father's estate from the time of his return home. He had lost his share in the original fortune and the profits made during his absence; all that was the father's belonged to the Elder Brother. "All that I have is thine," said the father, "there is no lack of appreciation on my part of your faithfulness, your industry, your toil; yours is the greater reward after all; this celebration is not given in honor of your prodigal brother, much less is it an approval of his way of living: it is but an expression of the joy of my father-heart at his safe return." He assures him that it is not that he loves the younger son more than him, still less is it that he loves the younger because the younger has been foolish.

Would it be a compliment to offer one who is lord of all the paltry gift of a kid? Why should one sigh for a part when he has the whole? "All things are yours," said Paul, speaking of the heritage of Christians; but it is possible to have them and yet fail to appropriate or enjoy them—possible to have at our finger tips the "all things" of Jesus, yet be poor indeed. It is tragic to be poor when we might be rich; to be weak when we might be strong; to be defeated when we might be victorious. But so it was with the Elder Son, and so it may be with us. "Thus a man after years of respectable living," says Marcus Dods, "may disclose a heart alien from God, and out of sympathy with Him; thus may he disclose that his whole past life has been unloving and self-seeking."

"But it was *meet* to make merry and be glad: for *this thy brother"*—yes, if we will not say it, God will say it—"was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So spoke the father with a firmness and finality, yet with a tenderness, that was not to be questioned.

III

Is it not obvious now that this father had two *lost* sons; that, as another has said, "there were two prodigals—one a prodigal in the far country, the other a prodigal at home; two prodigals—one alien from the father's love through sins of passions, the other through sins of temper; two prodigals—one eating the husks of fleshliness, the other eating the rancid food of a sour and sullen mind"?[1] Yes; both of his sons were "dead"—dead, one of them to decency and idealism, the other to the "all things" which belong to a son of God.

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[1] G. A. Butterick, *The Parables of Jesus,* Doubleday, Doran & Co.

The Elder Son threw missiles at his brother and father (that they were verbal made them no less hurtful) hot and jagged from his sore heart. But let him among us who is without sin of this particular kind, cast the first stone at him. Can we say, as he certainly could not, that we have not done deeds "that could cause the blush of shame to suffuse the face of innocence"?

How often is such an attitude displayed among the "sons of God" to-day. A man or woman with a "past" comes to the Father in honest repentance, and some among the brethren or sisters, who should be glad for their coming, refuse to acknowledge any kinship with them or to join in the feast of celebration. (The Jacobs are always a little contemptuous of the Esaus.) But such an attitude is unseemly to say the least. It is rebellion against the Father.

For the first time the Elder Son, to come back to him again, doubted the wisdom of his father. He accused him of injustice. Was this the way to receive back a prodigal? Was it not putting a premium on folly? Was it fair? He could not understand his father's ways.

It may be that these brothers had not been much in love with each other when they were at home together. Had the younger been driven into the far country in the first place by the tartness, the lovelessness of the elder? Had he been bored by his unctuous cant? One will do almost anything to escape boredom. It may be that the younger son would never have become a prodigal had he had in his older brother a saner example of religion. Was it this that made the elder brother dread to face the Prodigal now?

At any rate he found it a most distasteful thing to do. He would not go in.

And how many there are to-day who, on some such ground as this: "Because of those who profess to be Christians and do not live up to their profession," will not come in! They say, "if this is the kind of folk who are *in,* we prefer to remain *without.*" Whatever there may be to justify such a contention, *it is not enough!*

This man missed just what he so much needed after his hard day's work. He was hungry, and in need of food; weary, and in need of rest; lonely, and in need of fellowship: "But he was angry, and would not go in." So to-day there are multitudes who need what Christ and the Father's House can give them, who, because of minor offenses and little *alibis,* are missing what they so much need!

The Elder Brother standing angry-hearted and alone outside the home that night, was not only unhappy himself, but was preventing the complete happiness of all the others. Could the Prodigal enjoy the festival to the full, knowing that his brother stood without full of

"Malice and cold disdain;
Hot anger, sullen hate?"

And could the father have full peace of soul while his "other son" remained outside?

"He hath devoured thy living with harlots," he said bitingly. He had heard reports from the far country about the Prodigal's conduct. The account of his life of dissipation had found its way back. Who was he but an interloper, a valet accustomed to run sin's errands? This peepish, scampish fellow who had squandered his money and his manhood in fast living, and who now sneaks home in rags and tatters—what is he but a sycophantic charity-hunter, an empty-handed mendicant, a timorous and desponding coward caught in a sorry plight which has made him willing to lean on another and beg? Shameful mendicancy! Had he not come wearing his heart on his sleeve intruding where he had no rights? The brazen, unabashed audacity of it! To him these tactics of the wastrel were revolting. He felt unmeasured resentment.

IV

There were high doings in that house that day, and everyone enjoyed them but the Elder Son. It had been many years since the place had echoed to the sound of such merriment; and, though he refused to go in, I fancy him going to the window and looking in. If so, what did he see? He saw his younger brother seated in the place of honor clothed in his father's best robe—the robe which he wore only on great occasions—which he had not had on since his brother left home. On his feet were shoes such as were worn only by the most honorable and honored members of an Oriental family. On his finger gleamed his father's ring.

To him it was a travesty. His sense of decency and decorum was shocked. A feast like this in honor of a spendthrift! It was hideous and unjust. Such honors were not due a shabby vagrant. In sullen self-pity he grumbled, "Where do I come in?" It looked to him as if the most sinful were by the father most esteemed.

That the Elder Brother was surprised at this ovation we do not wonder. When a sinner seems to be better rewarded than a saint, it begins to look as if good and evil were cherished alike by God. It looks like an encouragement held out to sin; that God were given to caprice. His surprise was natural. You have been serving God and sacrificing, it may be, all your life; yet you have seen little but trial. Here are those who never made a sacrifice, who all their days have served themselves, not God; and yet their days—and they are often long and prosperous—have been plagued by never a trial. It *is* baffling. But is there cause for envy? None!

"For right is right, since God is God,
And right the day must win;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin."

This young man was angry because he was envious. Hence the occasion held no joy for him. The music was noise because it was not piped in his honor. If one is cheated out of what is rightfully his own, he has a right to be jealous. But he was more than jealous. He was green with envy; envy is of a darker hue. It is a disease of little minds, a tribute which fools pay to wisdom. It is the child of hate, not love. Where there is genuine love, envy cannot be. "Love envieth not." It has been said, Better not to live than not to love! Indeed, he who loves not, cannot be said really to live. The young man was taking, and had been taking all the while, the attitude of a slave. If he had any humor at all, it was grave-yard humor. His father was in an ecstasy of delight, but the Elder Son was *angry*. The frenzy of the love-delirious father only sickened him. It was unpardonable "softness" toward a derelict. The father was too forgiving.

V

As said above, the Elder Brother types the Pharisee. He *was* the Pharisee who, not entering the Kingdom himself, would not permit the sinner who was entering, to enter. The Pharisee could see only the vices of the outcasts whom Jesus loved, while He saw their virtues and potential good. Jesus knew what the Publicans were—told them what they were, but not without also telling them *what they might become.* The Pharisees told them what they were and said: "No hope for such as you!" They despaired of these sinful ones because their own hearts were "frozen with the pride of virtue."

This was the fault of the Elder Son: he held a magnifying glass on the sins of his brother, and considered his sudden return as only a stagey semblance of reform, a pretense. He was a cynic; the cynic scorns repentance as so much weakness, a disease of the will. He was the Pharisee; the Pharisee used the name of religion to gild his hypocrisy.

The Elder Son was incontestably good (according to his day's standard of goodness); his brother just as incontestably bad. But is there no golden mean between the incontestably good, who are often dull and uninteresting, and the damnably bad, who so frequently are not? The Prodigal had gone tragically wrong. He had been a creature of impulse. He had gone out not to seek his fortune, but to spend it. He was a low-lived, sensual hound. Moreover, all the companions he chose were like himself—no good either. They were attracted to him only for his money; that gone, they were gone. He had been a fool and a knave. Hunger had been the motive impelling his return. He would not have gone home had his money not given out. He went home as many do, when hungry. In his errant career he had been staging a melodrama, so it looked to his brother; and he had not been content until he had touched the stops of indulgence, of tragedy, of remorse.

But with all his badness, the Prodigal was still most human; while goodness and the sense of moral superiority on the part of his brother had made him, for all his decency and moral straightness, loveless and inhuman. It cannot be denied that wickedness tends to dehumanize men and women, and therein lies its chief curse, yet how eloquently does the Elder Brother proclaim that faultless goodness and correctness of living, according to the legal standard, may effectively drain all the springs of humanity and true spirituality in the human breast. He was morally so straight and stiff that he leaned over backward in his virtues. He was the patron of a gloomy religion. He was of that grouchy, devastating mood which is a strong characteristic of the religious joy-killer. He was never guilty of giving way to enthusiasm, was never swept by a generous impulse. The father had said, "this thy brother," but he said scathingly, "this precious son of yours." Why did he not say "this *my* brother"? He was far from sharing the feeling of brotherhood voiced by that pregnant line, "Thou art blood brother of my heart."

The younger son was a thoughtless recreant who depreciated home, who flouted restraint, who had run through with his share of the estate in wild living, who, on becoming penniless, was penitent, and then came home to be fêted and made over. To keep from starving he had hired himself out as a swine-herd, and in deep degradation, was fain to fill his belly with the swine's bean-pods. In his wretchedness he remembered that even the slaves in his father's house had enough to eat, and said, "I will arise and go to my father and will say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight; no more am I worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." "It was truly a base speech," says David Smith, "revealing the Prodigal's degradation." Had things gone well with him, he would have felt never a qualm. Selfish in his sin, he was selfish in his repentance. In truth he did not repent at all until he was in his father's arms, and then his heart melted."[1]

The father did not defend the younger son, he could not justify the way he had acted, but he *rebuked* the Elder Son. The implication was plain. It hurt the smug complacency of the Pharisees. It was Jesus' way of pointing out the defect in their way of dealing with those who had sinned. What was clearly lacking was brotherly love. The erring were shown no mercy. The father was merciful to his son because he loved him; only by being merciful could he do him perfect justice. "In the sympathy of Christ lay the secret of His power."

The parable brought to their remembrance His notorious friendliness toward the outcasts. Perhaps it served to recall their tussle with Him at the banquet in the house of Matthew the Publican; or His defense of the woman of questionable character who anointed Him in the house of Simon the Pharisee; or His exoneration of the woman taken in adultery—for which things they hated Him. They knew Him to be the comrade of sinners.

"Thanks to Saint Matthew, who had been
At mass-meetings in Palestine,
We know whose side was spoken for
When Comrade Jesus had the floor.

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[1] *The Days of His Flesh.* P. 311, Doubleday, Doran & Co.

"'A dangerous man,' said Caiaphas;
'An ignorant demagogue, alas!
Friend of low women, it is he
Slanders the upright Pharisee.'"[1]

VI

What if we carried out the implications of the teachings of Jesus toward our "scum of the earth" today? One of our poets has leveled a shaft of satire at the too cautious and prudent Christians of our day:

"Walk not too near these outcast sons of men
Where passed your Christ ahead! You, too, may share
The rabble's wrath! In time take heed! Beware
The woe—the bitter shame of Him again!
Your flaming zeal speak not so rash, so loud!
Keep on your prudent way within the crowd.

"What if they mark you of His band and cry:
'Behold this one, as well'? Ah, you should know
The jeers, the stones, for all that with Him go!
Have caution, fool! Let others yearn and die!
These broken ones you love with hot heartbreak
Can save you not! Be warned by His mistake!

"Remember how He spurned the risk and loss!
Remember how they nailed Him to a cross!"[2]

One may run away from his duties, as did the Prodigal, grieving parents and God, doing violence to his higher nature. Of such conduct a man must repent if he is to be reinstated in the Father's Household. But one who is the converse of all this—nay, outraged by it—may be equally wrong. The older brother was precise and rigid in his conduct, but his was a sunless religion, a religion of rule and rote, the kind espoused by those who sneered at Jesus saying, "This man receiveth sinners; is a friend of publicans." Such religion is an offense to man, an affront to God. All prodigals and publicans of whatever age can with courage and comfort sing of—

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[1] Sarah N. Cleghorn, *New Voices,* The Macmillan Co.
[2] Laura Simmons in *The Commonweal,* New York.

> "Jesus whose lot with *us* was cast,
> Who saw it out, from first to last:
> Patient and fearless, tender, true,
> Carpenter, vagabond, felon, Jew. . . "

For, as Katherine Lee Bates phrases it:

> "Open Door
> Henceforth for all
> Hungerers,
> Hearth and Banquet Hall
> For hurt and loneliness is He
> Thrust from Nazareth to roam
> Vagabond of Galilee,
> Who is every outcast's Home." [1]

VII

Why is it that the sins of the sinner seem to endear him to so many, especially to good people? No one of us but will forgive a sinner his sin, especially if he comes in tears of repentance, sooner than we will pardon the shortcoming of a saint. Truth to tell, there is something about these prodigals which is very attractive to all. Jesus Himself loved them more than others, not because of their baseness, surely, but because He was both human and Divine enough to understand them. He knew that if one who had been devoting his huge energies to sinning hugely can be enlisted in His Cause, that he is worth more than any straight-laced saint who never has hugely sinned.

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[1] From *Christ in the Poetry of Today,* Elvira Slack, The Woman's Press.

A great sinner is one of great misdirected energy. Conversion does not lessen that energy. The driving power remains. But it is given a new direction and is devoted to new purposes. It is a fact that "Joy seems to be felt more vividly and more exuberantly," says Robertson, "by men who have sinned much, than by men who have grown up consistently from childhood with religious education. Rapture belongs to him whose sins, which are forgiven, are many." "Alas," said John Bunyan, "Christ has but little thanks for the saving of little sinners." To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. The Prodigal had been all at it in his sin; and in his repentance he was all at it. But his pharisaical brother who had mistaken slavery to rules for religion, was half-hearted.

Goodness may easily become wearisome and the saint a bore, if they be not warmly human. How shall we excuse ourselves for failing to make goodness attractive? We need the will to live dangerously—the courage to light up our virtues in the flesh as these scandalous prodigals know how to do, even with their vices.

No man is saved by good works and obedience to rules. If so, then that certain rich young ruler who came to Jesus saying what none could gainsay—that he had kept all the commandments from his youth up—would never have been declared by Him outside the Kingdom.

"If sheep and oxen could atone for men,
Ah! at how cheap a rate the rich might sin!
And great oppressors might heaven's wealth beguile
By offering their own creatures for a spoil."

One cannot study this parable and miss the disturbing paradox it presents. The Prodigal Son who had lived a wild, dissolute life in the far country of sin, is at home with the father as the story ends; but the Elder Brother, who had been all the while at home, is *outside*—shut out by just himself. He would not go in. The Prodigal pressed in. Publicans and sinners come into the Kingdom before loveless and self-esteeming "saints."

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